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OUTLINES ON THE BOOK OF PSALMS

FOR MEDITATIONS AND SERMONS

BY THE REV.

ALFRED G. MORTIMER, D.D.

AUTHOR OF

"HELPS TO MEDITATION"; "CATHOLIC FAITH AND PRACTICE";

"IT RINGETH TO EVENSONG"; ETC.

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THE HISTORY OF THE
CITY OF LONDON
FROM THE FOUNDATION
TO THE PRESENT TIME

BY
JOHN STOW

THE SECOND EDITION
REVISED BY
JOHN STOW

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JOHN STOW

TO MY OLDEST FRIEND

1872—1925

THE REV. V. S. S. COLES, M.A.

HON. CANON OF CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD

I DEDICATE THIS WORK

PREFACE

OF all the books of the Bible, used in the services of the Church, the Book of Psalms occupies the most prominent place ; for, while the Gospels and Epistles are read through twice a year in the lessons, the whole Psalter is recited twelve times a year at Matins and Evensong ; and in addition to this, the Psalms are used in the Occasional Offices of the Prayer Book. Moreover, it is to the Psalms that we turn for comfort and help in times of sorrow, sickness and distress.

The purpose of this book is to endeavour to help the devout to do still more than this—to teach them to employ the Psalms more frequently in their private devotions. We read of the Saints spending hours in prayer—not in telling God the things they needed, and the trials and difficulties they would be glad to have removed from them—but in telling Him of their love for Him, of their desire to love Him more perfectly ; of their longing to know Him better ; not merely to know more about Him, but to know HIM with a more intimate and personal knowledge ; to thank Him for all His goodness, and to praise Him for what He has done for them, in redeeming them from sin, and in placing them in safety in His Church, where they are supplied with the grace of the Sacraments.

In the Psalms you find the inspired intercourse of the soul with God, in prayer, thanksgiving, and praise. In Ps. xxv. 1, we find, perhaps, the best definition of prayer, in the words, "*Unto Thee. O Lord, do I lift up my soul ; my God, I have put my trust in Thee.*" For prayer is essentially the uplifting of the soul to God with loving trust.

At this point, it may be better to give some simple examples of this use of psalms in prayer than merely to give rules for it. Let us begin with a morning psalm. It is a rule of most Religious Communities, and of many

devout souls, to recite the sixty-third psalm, of a morning while dressing ; and to vary it day by day with colloquies addressed to God, such as the following : “ *O God, Thou art my God.*” This is a wonderful act of faith with which to begin the day. “ *O God, Thou art my God !*” There is nothing more I can say. Thou art my GOD, therefore my ALL—my Creator, my Heavenly Father, from Whom come all the blessings of my life. “ *Early will I seek Thee*” (Vulg. “ *de luce,*” from the light, from the dawn, when the birds break into song). So will I begin each day with Thy praises. “ *My soul thirsteth for Thee, my flesh also longeth after Thee : in a barren and dry land where no water is.*” The two most imperious appetites of our nature are hunger and thirst ; and, here, the thirst of the soul for God is brought before us as the motive power of the spiritual life. Thus have I looked for Thee in the Sanctuary (Vulg. “ *in Sancto,*” not “ *in Sanctitate*”). Here we have God sought early in the Sanctuary, they are the words of one who now has the great privilege of a daily Eucharist. The mind from the moment of rising is occupied with joyous thoughts of his approaching worship in God’s Sanctuary. *For Thy loving kindness is better than the life itself*—Yes ; for what would life be without it ? all that makes life worth living comes from the loving-kindness of God. “ *My lips shall praise Thee. As long as I live I magnify Thee on this manner ; and lift up my hands in Thy Name. My soul shall be satisfied, even as it were with marrow and fatness ; when my mouth praiseth Thee with joyful lips.*” Can we make these words our own ? that to praise God satisfies fully our soul. Yet praise will be the one occupation of Heaven, and, surely, we should often exercise ourselves in it.

Then, for our devotions at night, there are many psalms which supply us with fitting thoughts and prayers. Let us take as examples two of the shorter Compline psalms—Ps. xxxi. 1-6 and Ps. cxxxiv. The second psalm at Compline consists of the first six verses of the thirty-first, which are often treated as a separate psalm.

In Thee, O Lord, have I put my trust ; let me never be put to confusion, deliver me in Thy righteousness.

The whole section of the psalm is an act of commendation of oneself to God, before resting for the night ; and ends, *Into Thy hands I commend my spirit ; for Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord, Thou God of truth.* But to return to the first verse, we have there an act of trust, followed by a prayer for deliverance from danger or evil, based upon our faith in our Lord's righteousness.

Bow down Thine ear to me ; make haste to deliver me (v. 2). It is as though we said, Lord, my prayers are so poor and weak that unless, in Thy goodness and mercy, Thou bowest down Thine ear, they can never reach Thee. Incline, therefore, Thine ear unto me, that Thou mayest hear me ; and make haste to help me.

And be Thou my strong Rock, and House of defence ; that Thou mayest save me. For Thou art my strong Rock, and my Castle ; be Thou also my Guide, and lead me for Thy Name's sake (vv. 3, 4). With this passage we may take the prayer, *O set me up upon the Rock that is higher than I ; for Thou hast been my hope, and a strong tower against the enemy* (Ps. lxi. 3). The picture is that of a shipwrecked man, vainly clinging to the base of a cliff, and struggling in the waves to draw himself up into a place of safety. He realizes the impossibility of doing this in his own unaided strength, but remembers that in the past God has helped him. Therefore, he is bold to pray, *Set me up upon the Rock that is higher than I ; for Thou hast been my hope, and a strong tower for me.*

The last psalm at Compline is Ps. cxxxiv. *Behold now, praise the Lord, all ye servants of the Lord ; ye that by night stand in the house of the Lord ; even in the courts of the house of our God. Lift up your hands in the sanctuary ; and praise the Lord* (Ps. cxxxiv. 1-3). This is the last of the Gradual or Pilgrim Psalms, and is thought to have been sung by the pilgrims leaving Jerusalem, as they passed the Temple at night, on their way home. It is addressed to the priests keeping the night watch in the Temple. The last verse—*The Lord that made heaven and earth, give thee blessing out of Sion*—is the response of the priests. How beautifully we can apply this to those in Heaven, who rest not day and night praising God, uniting our praises with theirs.

O my God, because, sinful that I am, I cannot worthily praise Thee, I join my prayers and praises, this night, with those of Thy saints and angels in Heaven, beseeching Thee that my offering may be accepted unto Thee, with their more perfect offerings of adoration and praise, through the merits of my Saviour Jesus Christ.

Let us end these examples with a prayer for use in time of sin or trouble or great temptation. There are many from which to choose, but we will take Psalm vi, the first of the Penitential Psalms.

O Lord, rebuke me not in Thine indignation; neither chasten me in Thy displeasure (v. 1). Here we have a sinner awakened to a true sense of his condition. Above him a justly offended God; beneath him (the creation of sin) the abode of the lost; around him an unsympathetic and tempting world; within him the gnawing worm of conscience.

These words are the utterance of a true penitent, who laments and hates sin above all things; and does not shrink from the scourge of those temporal chastisements, which, so far from separating the soul from God, drives it to Him. This Psalm which treats of the beginning of penitence, opens with fear, a fear of eternal punishment; but ends with the joy of pardon, deliverance, and the assurance of God's love. The psalm commences with fear. And some may object that this is a very low and secondary motive; since *there is no fear in love, but perfect love casteth out fear* (1. S. John iv. 18); and may ask, Is not love the right motive for contrition? Yes, but contrition is not, generally, the beginning of penitence; for perfect love is quite incompatible with wilful sin. Fear is often the beginning of a penitence which ends in love. S. Augustine in his great Commentary on the first Epistle of S. John (considered by many the most beautiful of all his writings) says, "The needle must go before the thread of love." The needle punctures the stuff, where the thread is to enter; the needle is drawn out, but the thread remains, and holds all the work together. So in penitence, *fear* punctures the hard heart, and bestows the grace of compunction; then love follows, and produces

that contrition which completes the work and binds the soul to God.

The penitent puts forth five pleas why God should spare him. As these are discussed on pp. 252, 253, we will only notice the first. *Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am weak* (v. 2). What stronger appeal could be made to God's pity than that of man's helplessness? I am weak, O Lord, and unless Thou strengthen me by Thy grace, I am helpless in my sin. It is, however, rather to the penitent's prayer that I would direct your attention. *Turn Thou, O Lord, and deliver my soul* (Vulg. "eripe," snatch away). Notice two words: "*Turn Thee.*" All first motions of grace must come from God. He must turn to us before we can turn to Him. And, then, the eager, passionate cry, *Snatch my soul away* from the temptations, the dangers, whatever that may be, which beset it.

Finally, there is the glorious act of faith—*Away from me, all ye that work vanity; for the Lord hath heard the voice of my weeping. The Lord hath heard my petition, the Lord will receive my prayer* (vv. 8, 9).

Could we not take psalms like these, and with the alteration of a few words, a paraphrase here and there, make them our own prayers to God? prayers which we could repeat again and again, feeling that they were indeed the inspirations of the Holy Spirit.

A few words, in conclusion, about the purpose and plan of the book. Primarily, as I have said before, it is intended to help people to use the Psalms more frequently in their private devotions, by borrowing from them the very words in which thousands of saints have held converse with God. I have also had in mind the hope that the clergy might find them useful in suggesting thoughts for sermons or addresses. Four Outlines are provided for each day of the month: two taken from the Morning psalms and two from those for the Evening. Thus the clergy would have, each Sunday, four to choose from; and, from the fact that each year the Sundays, for the most part, fall on different days of the month, there would be a sermon for each Sunday, on a passage in the Psalter for the day, for every Sunday for nearly three years.

The Prayer Book Version of the Psalms and that of the Revised Version in the Bible have both been used, and somewhat indiscriminately ; though where the Prayer Book Version departs from the Hebrew, in any important point, attention has generally been called to the correct translation.

I have frequently given the Vulgate rendering of a word or phrase, where S. Jerome, as so often, with a happy and pregnant word, sheds beauty and light upon a passage.

Should the book prove useful, it will probably be followed by another volume on different passages of the Psalter.

A. G. M.

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recommended for use by the Committee of the Church Assembly (N. A. 84).

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3.	Ps. 124, 125, 126, 127	-	-	-	214, 216	Ps. 81, 84	124, 126
4.	Ps. 128, 129, 130, 131	-	-	-	218	Ps. 145, 146	236
5.	Ps. 132, 133, 134	-	-	-	218	Ps. 107	170, 172
ASCENSION DAY:				Ps. 8, 21	-	-	8, 28
ASCENSION SUNDAY:				Ps. 93, 96	-	-	142
WHIT-SUNDAY:				Ps. 68	-	-	98, 100
TRINITY:				Ps. 29, 33	-	-	46
TRINITY-TIDE SUNDAYS:				Ps. 1, 3, 5	-	-	2, 4
1.	Ps. 1, 3, 5	-	-	-	12, 14, 16	Ps. 4, 7, 8	6, 8
2.	Ps. 10, 12, 13	-	-	-	22, 24	Ps. 15, 16, 17	18, 20
3.	Ps. 18	-	-	-	34, 36	Ps. 19, 20, 21	26, 28
4.	Ps. 24, 25	-	-	-	44, 254	Ps. 22, 23	260, 264, 30, 32
5.	Ps. 26, 28	-	-	-	48	Ps. 27, 29, 30	38, 40, 42
6.	Ps. 31, 32	-	-	-	58, 60	Ps. 33, 36	46, 50, 52
7.	Ps. 34	-	-	-	68, 70	Ps. 37	54, 56
8.	Ps. 39, 40	-	-	-	76	Ps. 41, 42, 43	62, 64
9.	Ps. 46, 47, 48	-	-	-	82	Ps. 44, 45	66
10.	Ps. 50, 53	-	-	-	94, 96	Ps. 51, 52	88, 90, 92
11.	Ps. 56, 57	-	-	-	106	Ps. 61, 62, 63	98, 100
12.	Ps. 65, 66	-	-	-	114	Ps. 68	110, 116
13.	Ps. 71	-	-	-	126, 128	Ps. 67, 72	134, 136
14.	Ps. 75, 76	-	-	-	130, 132	Ps. 73, 77	128, 140
15.	Ps. 84, 85	-	-	-	142	Ps. 89	-
16.	Ps. 86, 87	-	-	-	154, 156	Ps. 90, 92	-
17.	Ps. 92, 93	-	-	-	178, 180	Ps. 100, 101, 102	-
18.	Ps. 103	-	-	-	182, 184	Ps. 107	170
19.	Ps. 111, 112, 113	-	-	-	186, 188	Ps. 120, 121, 122, 123	210, 212
20.	Ps. 114, 115	-	-	-	-	Ps. 124, 125, 126, 127	214, 216
21.	Ps. 116, 117	-	-	-	-	Ps. 128, 129, 130, 131	-
22.	Ps. 118	-	-	-	-	Ps. 132, 133, 134	218, 220
23.	Ps. 110, 135	-	-	-	-	Ps. 137, 138, 139	224, 226
24.	Ps. 136	-	-	-	222	Ps. 140, 141, 142	228, 230, 232
25.	Ps. 49	-	-	-	234	Ps. 79, 83	-
26.	Ps. 84, 144	-	-	-	236	Ps. 105	-
Last	Ps. 145, 146	-	-	-	-	Ps. 147, 148, 149, 150	238, 240

DAILY PSALMS

THE SECRET OF HAPPINESS

"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the wicked, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful."—PSALM i. 1-3.

THE Psalter is the Christian's "Itinerary" in his pilgrimage to the heavenly Jerusalem. It guides him in the one straight way that leadeth to life, warning him of the many broad and devious paths which lead to destruction, and teaching him to avoid the nets and the snares set by the enemy of souls. It is the "Manual" of the Christian athlete who would contend for the mastery, and run the race for the prize. And as the prize is proclaimed before the conflict, so this Book opens with the proclamation of the reward—*blessedness*. The structure of the first two verses is instructive and illuminating; for they set in contrast three steps of descent in the way of guilt, and three steps of ascent in the path of holiness.

I. The descent of the soul is generally gradual.

i. The first step—Walking in the counsel of the wicked instead of in the wisdom of God. Walking, however, implies movement, and therefore life; and counsel (advice) is not always followed.

ii. The second—Standing in the way of sinners. Standing suggests greater permanence in evil; for the "way" is worse than the "counsel," as the sinful act is worse than the lawless word.

iii. The third—Sitting in the seat of the scornful. Here the habit is fully formed; there is a settling down to a state of sin; and "the scornful" indicates an aggressive attitude towards goodness. The man who began by listening to bad advice, and then consented to associate himself permanently with sinners has ended by tempting others to sin through scoffing at virtue.

II. The ascent of the soul. The godly man is one who has avoided all three of the stages by which the soul is gradually led away from God. But this is only negative godliness. The Psalmist therefore goes on to describe the three steps by which the soul progressively develops that

righteousness which makes it well-pleasing to God, and fruitful in the virtues of saintliness. *But his delight is in the law of the Lord ; and in His law doth he meditate day and night* (v. 2).

i. Delight. This implies something very positive, something far more than the mere avoidance of transgression—that which, in another place (Ps. cxix. 32), the Psalmist speaks of as “running the way of God’s commandments.” The godly man has such a conviction of the inherent wisdom and goodness of all God’s commandments that he is eager to fulfil them to the uttermost.

ii. Therefore the godly man meditates continually on God’s law. It occupies all his thoughts. In the day (of prosperity) he dwells with thanksgiving upon God’s many blessings.

iii. And in the night (of adversity) he searches his heart to find out what God would teach him by this visitation. He ponders on those words—*In faithfulness Thou hast afflicted me. And, It is good for me that I have been afflicted ; that I might learn Thy statutes.* And then he comforts himself by reflecting upon all God’s goodness to him in the past. He *calls to remembrance his song in the night*, that song of joy that welled forth from a grateful heart on the occasion of some special blessing, and believing that before long the sunshine of God’s favour will again beam upon him, he says, *Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy cometh in the morning* (cf. Ps. cxix, 75, 71 ; lxxvii. 6 ; xxx. 5). Thus day and night, in prosperity and in adversity, does the godly man meditate on that Divine law which always fills him with delight.

III. In the third verse we find the effects of a holy life pictured under the likeness of a fruitful tree planted by streams of water. So has God Himself planted the faithful soul in the Vineyard of His Church, where watered by the streams of grace, abundantly supplied in her sacraments, His elect are enabled to bring forth their fruit in due season, to His glory, and to their own everlasting felicity.

DAVID'S MORNING AND EVENING HYMN

"I laid me down and slept; I awaked; for the Lord sustaineth me."—PSALM iii. 5.

It is very suggestive that in the Psalms for the first morning of the month, we find three (i, iii, iv) which respectively provide us with a Pattern of Holy Life, a Morning Hymn, and an Evening Hymn. The first we have already considered. Let us turn our attention to the others. We shall begin with the Evening Hymn. For more than a thousand years, the fourth Psalm has been said daily at Compline, an Office added to the Day Hours of the Church early in the sixth century by S. Benedict. It also forms a part of the late Evensong of the Greek Church.

I. *Stand in awe, and sin not; Commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still. Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the Lord.* Here we have both our nightly self-examination and our preparation for the next morning's Eucharist. How important it is to think over the sins of the day, and to make an act of contrition for them, that you may indeed be able to sleep in peace. And then to select the intention with which you propose to offer the sacrifice of righteousness, if you are able to be present at the Eucharist, and thus to begin each day with Christ's blessing.

II. *In peace will I both lay me down and sleep: For Thou, Lord, alone makest me dwell in safety* (iv. 8). Having completed our self-examination and our preparation for communion (or for offering the Holy Sacrifice), we have in these last words of the Psalm a fitting solemn commendation of ourselves to God's protection during the night; an act of trust in Him—*Behold, He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is thy Keeper* (Ps. cxxi. 3-5). How tender are these promises of God's watchful care. *He shall give His angels charge over thee*; and especially your own guardian angel. Think of the thousands, nay millions, of religious who have said these words every night for thirteen hundred years, and of those in every

Christian country who are saying them to-night, and join your prayer with theirs.

III. *I laid me down and slept; I awaked; for the Lord sustaineth me.*

As the last words on lying down to sleep are an act of commendation of yourself to God's protection, so the first on rising should be a dedication of the new day and its work to His service, such as these words supply. S. Augustine, and most Commentators since, refer this passage to Christ's Resurrection, and regarding them as a prophetic anticipation of Easter Day. Every morning reminds us of resurrection; for then we rise to a new day of effort in His service—to work for Christ, to pray to Him, and to bear the Cross after Him. *Whatsoever ye do in word or in deed, do all in the Name of the Lord Jesus* (Col. iii. 17). Think, therefore, of our Lord's resurrection from the tomb, and pray that you *may know Him, and the power of His Resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings* (Phil. iii. 10); and that you may live this day in the power of His grace, and to His glory.

The chief value of the recitation of the Psalter is the help it affords us in the cultivation of a constant realization of the Presence of God; and therefore in the formation of the habit of looking up to God for strength and guidance in the various works of daily life. But more than this; it also aids us in the development of the practice of doing each duty with a definite intention of God's glory; and, when it is done, of offering it to Him. The Eye of God is always upon us, not only to mark what is done amiss, but also to watch with loving approval every effort to do Him faithful service.

GOD'S DAILY JUDGMENTS

"God is a righteous Judge, Yea, a God that hath indignation every day. If a man turn not, He will whet His sword; He hath bent His bow, and made it ready. He hath also prepared for him the instruments of death; He maketh His arrows fiery shafts."—PSALM vii. 11-13.

WE are familiar with the thought of two judgments—the Particular Judgment at the moment of death and the General Judgment at the last day. This passage reminds us of a third—the continual Assize before which men are daily being judged.

I. The idea brought before us in this passage is that of the judgments of God's Providence as manifested in our daily experiences. *God is a righteous Judge.* The Eye of God is ever on us, and the very fact that God is righteous involves the certainty that God cannot be indifferent to the sin He beholds in us. He is *a God that hath indignation every day.* His attitude towards sin is always the same; for He is a God that changeth not; and that attitude of indignation issues in the punishment of the sinner, *if a man turn not.* God is also a God of love and mercy, "Who desireth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he may turn from his wickedness, and live." God's attitude is immutable, towards sin always that of indignation, towards penitence always that of forgiving love.

II. The instruments of death. How many they are! The sword, the bow, the fiery arrows! These seem to represent the various forms of sudden and violent death by which a man's days may be cut short. Even for the best of us the words of the burial anthem are true—"In the midst of life we are in death." And the instruments of death are not confined to the weapons of war. The more insidious and fatal germs of pestilence often lurk in the most unexpected places—a little breath of air laden with malarial or other deadly emanations, a draught of water in which is the fatal bacillus of cholera or typhoid, a railway accident, etc. The uncertainty of life ought to be a great deterrent from a sinful life; for while, to the godly, death

need have no terrors, since to him it is but the opening of the prison door which ushers him into the glorious liberty of Christ's kingdom of love ; yet to the sinner death is the call to judgment, the door which opens for him into the Court of the righteous Judge, Whose wrath and indignation he has most justly provoked. The thought that we are daily passing across a great battle-field, with the instruments of death threatening on every side, should give pause to a life of sin, and inspire in the sinner the desire of penitence.

III. *If a man turn not*, etc. These words indicate that there is but one thing to be done. We cannot change the immutable attitude of God—indignation towards sinners, mercy towards the penitent. But we can change our own relation to God. If a man turn not, then the instruments of death. But if he turn, then what ? *I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God : wherefore turn yourselves, and live* (Ezek. xviii, 32).

What does this conversion involve ? It requires a complete change of life, really a turning of the *will* to God. We have a somewhat detailed account of S. Paul's conversion (Acts ix, xxii., xxvi). What were its chief fruits ? 1. Readiness to obey God in all things—*What shall I do, Lord ?* (Acts xxii. 10). This is not only the first but the most important fruit, since it is the root from which all the others spring—a real devotion to the will of God. Sin is self-will. 2. Preparation for the sacraments of the Church by its ministers. Ananias is sent to instruct and baptize S. Paul. 3. Humility, showing itself in a willingness to be taught. The pupil of the great Gamaliel is instructed by an ordinary minister of Christ. 4. A readiness to confess Christ before men (ix. 20).

THE SECONDARY IMAGE OF GOD IN MAN

“What is man, that Thou art mindful of him, and the son of man, that Thou visitest him? . . . Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of Thy hands; Thou hast put all things under his feet.”—PSALM viii. 4, 6.

DOMINION is the secondary image of God in man. God alone has supreme power and sovereign dominion. Human rights have their authority only in divine right. The right to exercise dominion was a formal grant from God to man, expressed by a sovereign decree—*And God created man in His own image . . . And God blessed them: and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth* (Gen. i. 28; cf. ix. 1, 2.).

I. The primary image of God is found in the constitution of man's soul—in the threefold character of the soul, as manifested in memory, understanding, and will. These three powers act together in the one simple indivisible substance of the soul. To the last two, rich endowments are added. To the intellect, that creative power which is the exclusive possession of man, and finds its highest expression in what we term genius. On the side of the will, that freedom of choice which makes man a responsible being, and gives to his actions a moral value. Moreover, we must add those relations with one another which pertain to men alone—sympathy, affection, compassion, and, above all, love.

II. The Psalm, however, draws our attention to what is termed the “secondary” image of God—dominion over all other creatures. This, too, is man's exclusive prerogative. We do not find it possessed, even in a limited form, by any other creatures. Some have a kind of social government among themselves, as ants, bees, beavers, etc., but not dominion over other species.

The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein (Ps. xxiv. 1; I Cor. x. 26).

And the Lord of the universe has made man His Viceroy over every other creature that the world contains. But a Viceroy, though he exercise kingly powers, is responsible to the sovereign whom he represents, and to whom he has to give account of his government. He is not appointed for his own aggrandisement only, but for the benefit of those under his rule, that they may be prosperous and happy.

Our Lord illustrates this in the Parable of the Pounds. The servants, to whom their lord has entrusted ten pounds, are to trade with this till his return. Then an account is rendered of their use of the money committed to them ; and they are rewarded or punished according to the fidelity or negligence with which they have fulfilled their stewardship.

III. God created everything for a definite end, and in the fulfilment of this God is glorified, and the creature is said to praise Him. Man, therefore, as God's Viceroy must so use the creatures under his dominion that they may accomplish God's purpose, and thus praise and glorify their Maker. His canticle should be the *Benedicite, omnia opera*, his aim so to use each creature that in its employment God may be glorified. S. Paul, treating of one creature only—food—reminds us that this should be received with thanksgiving (cf. I Tim. iv. 4). To this we may add that food should be used with moderation, to minister to our needs, not to gluttony.

Covetousness is the special sin by which we allow the creatures which should lead us to God in loving recognition of His wisdom, goodness, and power, to come between us and God ; thus making of them instruments of temptation, and objects of idolatry. Man was created with a passion of "having." This can only be fully satisfied by the possession of God. Many, alas, try to gratify it with creatures, but find these powerless to satisfy an immortal soul.

THE NAME OF GOD

"And they that know Thy Name will put their trust in Thee ; for Thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek Thee."—
PSALM ix. 10.

WHAT is in a name ? Names are signs of thought. They are more. They are instruments of thought ; storehouses wherein treasures of the past are laid up, like ancient heirlooms, often redolent with the memories of controversies of bygone days ; vessels from which can be poured out the choicest vintages of knowledge ; coins minted in the exchequer of nations, stamped with the image and superscription of their mightiest intellects, which pass from mind to mind, circulating the rich treasures of reason. But they are even more than this : for they are also the pulses which record the heart-beats of human experience.

I. *They that know Thy Name.* What is it to know the Name of God ? It is to possess a knowledge surpassing that of the wisest philosophers of the Greeks, who had the greatest natural intellects the world has produced. For it is to know Him Who is the Source of all being, the Father of spirits in Whom we live, and move, and have our being. It is to know Him Who created all things, and to know Him, as only He can be known, through the revelation of His Holy Spirit. *For . . . the things of God none knoweth save the Spirit of God. But we received . . . the Spirit which is of God ; that we might know the things that are freely given to us by God* (I Cor. ii. 11, 12). It is to know that for which His Name stands, to have an experimental acquaintance with the attributes of God, through which the character of God is revealed to us. For the Name of God is that whereby He makes Himself known as the God of love and grace to His people. Omniscient, therefore acquainted with all their needs and sorrows. Omnipotent, therefore able to succour to the utmost those who cry to Him. Merciful, for His mercy endureth for ever ; and is especially promised to them that show mercy. God !—Whom to know is life eternal (cf. S. John, xvii. 3) ; for to

know Him is to love Him ; and to love Him is indeed to live !

II. *They that know Thy Name will put their trust in Thee.* All that have just views of God, and who understand His real character, will confide in Him absolutely. For they are convinced that He has a character which is worthy of confidence ; since those who know Him best rely upon Him entirely. The more intimate our knowledge of God, the more complete is our trust in Him. How many of the Psalms have for their antiphons such words as these : *The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer ; my God, my strong rock, in Him will I trust* (xviii. 1 ; cf. also xxxi. 3 ; xl. 1-3 ; lxxi. 1-3, etc.). The Psalms are the utterances of those who knew God, and had therefore learned that *He is a very present help in trouble* (Ps. xlv. 1) ; therefore they had no fear though the world's storms raged around them in greatest fury.

III. *For Thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek Thee.* The last words are not to be regarded as the equivalent of "them that honour Thee" or "them that worship Thee" ; but as indicating the essential difference between seekers after God and worshippers of heathen deities. The latter seek their deities for the gifts they hope to receive from them : wealth, honour, power, etc., or deliverance from evils. The former seek God for HIMSELF, because they recognize in Him the perfect ideal of their highest conceptions of Beauty, Goodness, and Truth. They are therefore drawn to Him by the bands of love (cf. Hos. xi. 4). Such seekers know that they will never be forsaken by God. They may have trouble or affliction or a sense of being forsaken, when His Presence seems hidden from them, and they suffer coldness and desolation in their devotions. But they know it is for their good that they are being thus tried, and that the clouds will pass, and the sunshine of His Presence stream upon them once more. They can say with holy Job, *Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil ?* (Job ii. 10). They recall the words of Scripture, *Himself hath said, I will in no wise fail thee, neither will I in any wise forsake thee* (Heb. xiii. 5).

THE CRY OF THE OPPRESSED

“Why standest Thou afar off, O Lord? Why hidest Thou Thyself in times of trouble?”—PSALM x. 1.

THE theme of this Psalm is oppression. It is divided into two parts—a description of the oppressor, and the cry of the oppressed. God is revealed as the ultimate Helper of the distressed, and as the Avenger of his wrongs.

I. The character of the oppressor is sketched in powerful language, and the elements which go to make up his line of action are carefully analysed (vv. 2-11).

i. The first is pride; and its effect is manifested in persecution—the *poor is hotly pursued* (v. 2). The evidence of pride is seen in the words, *For the wicked boasteth of his heart's desire*. So far from being ashamed of his conduct—the oppression of the poor—he glories in it. And blesseth the covetous, but contemneth the Lord (v. 3). Pride and covetousness are sins which are closely allied, especially in the work of oppression, since its root is not only pride but the desire for the gain which is to be made by grinding down the poor and helpless. Those who pursue such ends openly show their contempt for the commandment of God which enjoins compassion of the poor (cf. Lev. xix. 10); for in their pride they say, *He will not require it* (v. 4). All his thoughts are, *There is no God*. He shuts his eyes to God's judgments, and, *as for all his adversaries, he puffeth at them*. *He saith in his heart. I shall not be moved* (vv. 5, 6).

ii. To pride cruelty is added. Cursing, deceit, oppression; but his is not open cruelty. It is in the lurking places of the villages, in the covert places that he murders the innocent. His eyes are firmly set against the helpless (cf. vv. 7, 8). Then comes a description of the underhand ways in which he catches the poor in his net (cf. vv. 9, 10).

II. In verse 12, we have the cry of the oppressed, *Arise, O Lord; O God, lift up Thine hand; Forget not the poor*. This prayer is the incessant cry of the Church on behalf of all her poor saints. In the first verse, we have the question of surprise, *Why standest Thou afar off, O*

Lord? Why hidest Thou Thyself in times of trouble? S. Augustine takes the latter clause as containing the real answer to the former. Because it is the *needful* time of trouble, because *it is expedient for you that I go away* (S. John xvi. 7), needful that you should be tested by affliction borne without the help and comfort of God's sensible Presence. And yet God is never far off, never beyond the reach of our cry; though for our good He may for a while delay to answer it.

III. *Thou hast seen it; for Thou beholdest travail and grief, to take it into Thy hand: the helpless committeth himself unto Thee: Thou hast been the Helper of the fatherless* (v. 14). God may seem to tarry that the discipline of trouble may do its work; but God's Eye is upon us, and in His own good time He will take our cause in hand. None are dearer to God than the poor, the helpless, and the fatherless. Their lot may be hard in this world, but there is a world beyond, where their wrongs will be righted, and where they will rest in peace. The only time that our Lord lifted the veil and permitted us one brief glance into the intermediate state, He showed us the condition there of the rich oppressor who neglected the poor beggar at his door, and Lazarus, who, in experiencing such great misery in the presence of such exceeding luxury, may often have asked this question, *Why standest Thou afar off, O Lord? Why hidest Thou Thyself in times of trouble?* His name, Lazarus (God is my Helper), suggests his trust in God, and we are permitted to see how it was rewarded.

THE WORDS OF GOD

"The words of the Lord are pure words ; As silver tried in a furnace on the earth, purified seven times."—
PSALM xii. 6.

THE " words " of the Lord are here distinguished from the " word " of the Lord. The latter is a particular command, or message, or prophecy ; and sometimes the sum total of Divine truth. In the former it is the actual utterances in which this truth is recorded for us. Similarly, Christ distinguished between His *speech* and His *word*: " Word " being the matter, and " speech " the manner or spiritual idiom in which the matter was expressed. They did not understand the latter because they would not receive the former (cf. S. John viii. 43).

I. The metaphor is derived from the precious metals whose value and purity have been determined in the furnace, wherein the dross has been separated from the ore. This separation in Holy Scripture is not effected by man's investigations or criticism, but has already been made by God Himself, Who gives us only the purest metal from which the dross has been purged. His words have, indeed, been tested through many generations, and by countless individuals ; and have been found perfect by all those who have diligently followed their teachings. Some have used them as the lantern to guide their steps in the darkness of the night of trial and difficulty ; some as an adviser in perplexity ; some as a comfort in great sorrow ; some for encouragement in despondency ; but all who have made real proof of the words of God bear witness that, " tried to the uttermost," they proved most pure, and that they were sweet unto their taste ; yea, sweeter than honey to their mouth (cf. Ps. cxix. 140 ; 103). We have in Ps. cxix the experiences of an inspired writer concerning the words of God ; and he found them the joy of his life.

II. *Purified seven times.* S. Augustine refers them to our Lord's pure words, the Beatitudes, in which, after seven blessings have been pronounced on the poor, the mourning,

the meek, the righteous, the merciful, the pure in heart, and the peacemakers, the eighth, summing up all these into one, pronounces a blessing on those who are persecuted, and have thus reached the final state of purification from things of earth, because the eighth Beatitude, as the octave of eternal life, does but repeat the first note on a higher interval. Others take it of the sevenfold gifts of the Spirit set forth in the words of Isaiah. These are the special endowments of the baptized soul. Another remarks that "the Bible has passed through the furnace of persecution, literary criticism, philosophic doubt, and scientific discovery, and has lost nothing but the human interpretations which cling to it as alloy to precious ore." The experience of saints has tried it in every conceivable manner, but not a single doctrine or promise has been consumed in the most excessive heat.

III. What are the words of God to us ? How far have the testimonies of the inspired writers of the Psalter been justified by our experiences ? Is the word of God sweet to our taste ? a lantern to our paths ? the most precious treasure we possess ? Do we meditate on it daily ? If not, why not ? Surely, it must be because we have never really studied with faith and prayer. We have not expected much help from it, and have therefore read it only superficially. S. John tells us that, after the miraculous draught of fishes, S. Peter, when he recognized Christ, girt about him his fisher's coat, and cast himself into the sea, that he might reach Jesus more speedily. A quaint writer employs this as an illustration of the study of Scripture. We must, he says, gird about us our fisher's coat, using all the helps of commentaries, etc. ; and then dive into the deep of God's word, with the certainty that we shall find the Lord everywhere in it.

THE QUESTION IN TRIBULATION

"How long, O Lord, wilt Thou forget me for ever," etc.—
PSALM xiii. 1.

THE fourfold repetition of the question "How long" is very suggestive of man's impatience under tribulation. This is not only the question of "the man after God's own heart," but the cry of the O.T. martyrs under the heavenly altar (Rev. vi. 10). It is, indeed, the question of almost every soul in perplexity, whether personal or social, whether wrung from a heart agonized by struggle against strong and long continued temptation, or from a soul perplexed by the spectacle of the wickedness of the world and of the seeming powerlessness of the Church to deal with the difficulties which confront it.

I. *How long, O Lord, wilt Thou forget me for ever? How long wilt Thou hide Thy face from me?*

i. God forget! What an unworthy thought! What a foolish temptation! Can Omniscience fail in memory? If such a temptation should assail us, we should read the prophet—*But Zion said, Jehovah hath forsaken me, and the Lord hath forgotten me. Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, she may forget, yet will not I forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands* (Isa. xlix. 14-16). No. God can never forget. We must find some other reason for His delay. Surely it is because there is something in our trials or in our lives that is displeasing to Him; and He waits for us to put it away; or else it is for our discipline, a test of our faith and endurance. So we read of our Lord that He lets a trial continue till it has reached its height before He comes to our aid. He allowed His Apostles to toil on in rowing against a tempestuous sea for some 25 or 30 furlongs, before, in the fourth watch of the night, just before the dawn, He came to their succour (S. Mark vi. 48; S. John vi. 19). We read too, of a certain man at the pool of Bethesda, who had an infirmity thirty-eight years; and of a woman with a

spirit of infirmity eighteen years, before Christ healed them (S. John v. 5 ; S. Luke xiii. 11).

ii. *How long wilt Thou hide Thy face from me ?* This has been taken as the cry of the world before the Incarnation ; for it was not till then that the face of God was revealed—We beheld His glory, glory as of the Only-Begotten of the Father. Seeing it is God . . . Who shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (S. John i. 14 ; II Cor. iv. 6). That face may be hidden from us for a while on account of our sins, or as a discipline. Is this not sometimes the case, when in our blindness we fail to see God's loving Providence in our chastisement ?

II. *How long shall I take counsel in my soul, Having sorrow in my heart all the day ? How long shall mine enemy be exalted over me* (v. 2). The first clause may refer to that searching of the soul which is so helpful in enabling us to discover the cause of our sorrows in the sins of our life, and thus be led to such penitence as may restore us to God's favour. The latter may be taken of those spiritual foes who are exalted over us so long as they keep us tied and bound by the chains of our sins.

III. It has been noticed that the question "How long" is put in four shapes—as it seems to be, as it is, as it affects himself within, and his foe without. It will be helpful to our spiritual life to try to answer these four questions in the light of God's revelation in H.S. of the true purposes of affliction. This will enable us to meet our troubles with perfect trust in God, and by the guidance of the Holy Spirit to use them as a means of driving us to God for help, and of uniting us more closely to our Divine Master, "the Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief," Who was bruised for our iniquities, and by Whose stripes we are healed (cf. Isa. liii. 3-5).

THE PATH OF LIFE

"Thou wilt shew me the path of life : In Thy presence is fulness of joy ; In Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore."—PSALM xvi. 11

THIS passage must be interpreted in the light of the two preceding verses, which are adduced, both by S. Peter and S. Paul, as a prophecy of Christ's resurrection (Acts, ii. 30, 31 ; xiii. 35-37). It seems impossible to suppose that David, who here expresses such fulness of confidence in God, such a living personal relationship to Him, could ever have dreamed that that relationship would end with death ; especially when we remember that it was uttered in immediate connection with the prophecy of our Lord's resurrection.

I. The path of life. Not merely the life of the body, as is evident from the joy and pleasures immediately following, which are to be found in God's presence and in communion with Him. Life in the only true sense is union with God ; from which, of necessity, springs our conception of immortality. The path of life is the path that leads to the Source of all life, God Himself. It is the way to Heaven. But this path of life is Christ, Who said, *I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life : no one cometh unto the Father but by Me* (S. John xiv. 6). To follow Him is to tread in the path of life. We must ever bear in mind that there is but one Way, one Guide, one End—Jesus. The traveller here makes his act of faith—*Thou wilt shew me the path of life* ; for, if Thou didst not, I could never find it by myself. How many on every side of me are following other paths which lead only to transitory pleasures—wealth, honour, power in this world ; but *in Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore*.

II. Man's capacity for joy. While in this world sin has left its deadly mark, how much capacity for joy there is everywhere ! The flowers in their summer beauty, the butterflies winging their devious path among them, the drone of the bees, and, in the tropics, the voices of insect life at night, how joyous they all are ! At the creation of

this beautiful world with its great possibilities of happiness, well did the morning stars sing together, and all the sons of God shout with joy (cf. Job xxxviii. 7). But man ! How much greater is his capacity for happiness ; for his felicity is not, like that of the lower animate creation, limited to physical joy ; he has besides that the joy of the intellect and of the affections, which is so diverse, and so immense.

The natural effect of sin is to quench all desire after God, and therefore to dry up the sources of the chief spring of joy in man. The Bible, a Book of the deepest revelation of human life, is full of varied images of joy ; but, beyond the range of natural life, it opens to us the ranges of spiritual joy—the joy of forgiveness, of salvation, of trust, of peace, of fellowship with God and Christ. Yet, higher still, it lifts our thoughts to the joy of the angels, more, to the joy of God over one sinner that repenteth, joy in the Father's house over the return of a prodigal (cf. S. Luke xv. 7, 10, 32 ; Zeph. iii. 17).

III. The supreme joy—Heaven. Joy, first, in the realization of God's presence here ; but the fulness of joy only in His unveiled presence in heaven. There, every part of our nature will have its joy, every faculty that has been developed here by the discipline of life. And this joy will be "for evermore." Here, to dampen every joy, is the thought that it will not last. There, the joys are eternal. And then how many, and how great they will be ! —the joy-bearing gifts in God's right hand. Of these it is written, Things which eye saw not, and ear heard not, and which entered not *into the heart of man*, *Whatsoever things God prepared for them that love Him* (I Cor. ii. 9).

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THE TWO VISIONS OF LIFE

"As for me, I shall behold Thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness."—
PSALM xvii. 15.

IN the latter part of this Psalm (vv. 13-15) we have, in strongest contrast, the two ends which men set before them as the goal of their life, two visions of life—the good things of this world, or the supreme good of the next—God Himself. Each of us has to make his choice. The question here suggested is which will *satisfy* the soul?

I. The goods of this world. The wicked are described as *men of the world, whose portion is in this life* (v. 14). The contrast is drawn between "men of the world" and "men of the world to come," between those whose vision is limited to earth and those whose vision is fixed on eternity. The portion of the former is summed up under three heads.

i. *Whose belly Thou fillest with Thy treasure.* The "belly" is frequently used of the sensual appetites (cf. Rom. xvi. 18; Phil. iii. 19): not only for the gratification of the glutton, but for all those things of art and beauty of fragrance and melody, which belong to sumptuous living and minister to the senses—to the eye and ear and palate. These are God's treasures bestowed on men. They are not in themselves harmful, they undoubtedly give enjoyment to many; but can they *satisfy* a man permanently?

ii. *They are satisfied with children.* Their desire for the joys of family life, for many sons and daughters, is fulfilled. It was the fondest hope of a Jew that from his loins a race would prolong his name far down the pages of history.

iii. *They leave the rest of their substance to their babes.* They have not only the enjoyment of wealth during their lives, but the satisfaction of leaving their possessions to their children, and to their descendants; the gratification of looking forward to their posterity, who would perpetuate not only their name but their great family fortune. To them indeed is given to the utmost the fulfilment of their heart's desires. They have everything *except grace and the fellowship*

of God : everything for the few years of their sojourn here, but nothing for the endless ages of eternity.

II. *As for me*, etc. (v. 15). Here we have the contrast, the alternative end of a man's life, the other object which can engross his whole being, and become the substance of his pursuit—the face, the vision of God. To God's command, *Seek ye My face*, this man has answered, *My heart said unto Thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek* (Ps. xxvii. 8). He does not envy nor covet the worldling's happiness. His vision of beatitude is altogether different—to behold God's face, and by that vision to be changed into His image. As S. Paul writes, *We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory* (II Cor. iii. 18). As S. John puts it, *It is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if He shall be manifested, we shall be like Him ; for we shall see Him even as He is* (I S. John iii. 2). So the Psalmist says, *As for me, I shall behold Thy face in righteousness : I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness*.

III. Is this my desire ? Shall I be satisfied with that vision of God ? Am I now thrilled with the glimpses of that Presence which are vouchsafed to me in my communions and meditations ? Will this, of which now I sometimes taste, in its fulness satisfy me ?—the Presence of Christ, the forming in myself His likeness, the possession of eternal fellowship with Him, the beholding, without a veil, the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ ? Is this for me Heaven ?

The men of the world, whose portion is in this life may sometimes obtain the satisfaction of these desires here in this world ; but in eternity those things are not, except so far as their fruits last on perhaps in an eternity of woe. Those, however, who have sought the face of God here shall behold the King in His beauty in the land that is very far off (cf. Isa. xxxiii. 17). And they shall be *satisfied*.

THE UTTERANCE OF A GRATEFUL HEART

"I love Thee, O Lord my strength. The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; My God, my strong rock, in Him will I trust; my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my high tower."—PSALM xviii. 1, 2.

IN this, one of the most magnificent hymns of the Psalter, David, in a few grand outlines, sketches the story of his past life—a marvellous record of deliverances and victories vouchsafed to him by Jehovah. The hymn concludes, as it had opened, with a joyful thanksgiving to God, Who had done for him such great things.

I. The Psalm begins with a great act of love—*I love Thee, O Lord, my strength*. And the word translated "love" implies a strong tender affection, such as the love of child and parent, of spouse and husband; it occurs (in Qal, and in this meaning) only here: elsewhere it is used of the love of God to man, but never that of man to God. It has been rendered "fervent love." It seems as though David, in reviewing the many mercies vouchsafed to him during his stormy life, and God's deliverances of him from so many perils, was striving to find language adequate to express the deep and grateful love which filled his whole soul.

II. He then adds to this act of love eight epithets of God, as indicating the chief aspects of God's dealings with him which provide the reasons for his great love.

i. *My strength*. In the mouth of two witnesses every word shall be established (cf. S. Matt. xviii. 16). David and S. Paul knew of but one cure for weakness—God. The one said, *I love Thee, O Lord, my strength*. The other, *I can do all things in Him that strengtheneth me* (Phil. iv. 13). Both recognized that all their strength was of God.

ii. *My rock*. Here we have an act of faith in God as the very foundation of our spiritual life.

iii. *My fortress*. That is, my defender.

iv. *My deliverer*. This implies something more than passive resistance, it means effective and active intervention to extricate him from the threatening perils.

v. *My strong rock, in Him will I trust*, carries us a step farther, to that state of perfect confidence which is the result of the possession of an impregnable stronghold.

vi. *My shield*. By which all the fiery darts of the Evil One are quenched, and warded off.

vii. *The horn of my salvation*. Here we pass from defence to attack ; for the "horn" is a symbol of strength in attack, an image drawn from animals who push with their horns.

viii. Lastly, *My high tower* (My refuge). For *the Name of the Lord is a strong tower : the righteous runneth into it, and is set on high* (Prov. xviii. 10).

III. We often mourn over the fact that our love for God is so cold. Does not David in this Psalm teach us a mode by which we may quicken it ? A fire will not burn without fuel ; and such a meditation on God's dealings with us throughout our life, recalling His many mercies to us, ought to provide abundant fuel to feed the flame of love in our hearts. Our meditation might take the form which David sets before us—an examination of our life from the point of view of God's relations with us as our Strength, our Defender, our Deliverer, etc., recalling in detail our chief deliverances in danger, sickness, adversity, temptation, habits of sin, etc. What return have we made to God for all His goodness ? Would not the remembrance of its many manifestations be enough to stir our hearts to grateful love ?

THE MEDIUM THROUGH WHICH WE SEE GOD

"With the merciful Thou wilt shew Thyself merciful ; with the perfect man Thou wilt shew Thyself perfect ; with the pure Thou wilt shew Thyself pure ; and with the perverse Thou wilt shew Thyself froward."—PSALM xviii. 25, 26.

THIS passage teaches us that God's attitude towards men is regulated by their attitude towards Himself (cf. I Sam. ii. 10). But is there not here also a deeper lesson ?—that a man's views of God are coloured by his own character ; and that one of the penalties of sin is that it so distorts our conception of God as to interpose a barrier, of our own creation, between ourselves and God, which hinders alike our approach to God, and His gifts to us.

I. *And this is life eternal, that they should know Thee the only true God* (S. John xvii. 3). Man was created with intellectual and moral gifts which can only find their full satisfaction in the knowledge of God. But this knowledge is attainable only through the medium of our character ; for our character is, so to speak, the atmosphere through which we see God. Sometimes we say, How red the sun is to-day ! Yet we know that the red appearance is caused by the presence in the atmosphere of minute particles of matter, and not by any change in the sun itself. So the different conceptions men form of God are largely the result of the atmosphere through which they behold Him. Man has implanted in him a thirst for knowledge, and strives to satisfy it either by a knowledge of the Creator or of the creatures. If the former be the *end* of our quest, the study of the creatures should prove so many steps in the ladder by which we mount up to the heart of God, and learn the greatness of His love for us. But, if we make the creatures themselves our *end*, they come between us and God, and hide Him from our eyes. When the moon shines with the reflected light of the sun, its reflected rays lighten our darkness ; but when it comes between the earth and the sun, it hides the sun from us, and leaves us in the darkness of night.

II. This is the special revelation of our text. The merciful man recognizes in God the operation of His mercy everywhere—that *His mercies are over all His works* (Ps. cxlv. 9). How many of the Psalms have this for their theme? The perfect man finds his delight in contemplating the infinite perfections of God. The pure is attracted by the absolute holiness of God. But the perverse (this term indicates crookedness of character) sees perverseness or frowardness in God. He cavils at God's providential dealings, regarding them as cruel or unjust; for he fixes his gaze only on the sorrows and pains of life, and ignores their disciplinary effect. Christ's parable of "The Talents" illustrates this. The servant who hid his talent in the earth instead of using it said, as an excuse, *I knew Thee that Thou art a hard man, reaping where Thou didst not sow, and gathering where Thou didst not scatter* (S. Matt. xxv. 24). His false conception of his Lord's character did not save him from being cast into the outer darkness. The darkness of his evil heart had prevented him from recognizing his Lord's true character and his own responsibility for the talent entrusted to him.

III. So it was with our Lord when on earth. Self-righteous Pharisees, sceptical Sadducees, and others, saw in Him nothing Divine; but His disciples beheld His glory (cf. S. Matt. xiii. 13, 14; S. John i. 14). This law is universal. What God is to you, what Christ is to you, shows what you are, and determines what you shall be in eternity.

A PATTERN OF SELF-EXAMINATION

“Who can discern his errors? Clear Thou me from hidden faults. Keep back Thy servant also from presumptuous sins; Let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be perfect, and I shall be clear from great transgression.”—PSALM xix. 12, 13.

IN this Psalm three aspects of God's work are brought before us—the operations of God in nature (vv. 1-6); in revelation, in His holy law (vv. 7-11); and in the heart and conscience of man (vv. 12-14). The third, which we are to consider, is suggested by the second. For the description of the perfect law of God ends with the promise of a great reward to them that keep it (v. 11). This must lead each of us to the question—How far can I hope for this reward? How far have I kept this perfect law? To answer this demands careful self-examination, in the performance of which a consideration of verses 12 and 13 will be found helpful. They describe four stages in the development of sin.

- i. Errors—i.e., involuntary sin.
- ii. From this there is an advance to hidden or secret sin.
- iii. Then, to sins of presumption.
- iv. And finally, the climax is reached in ruling sins, which hold a man in hopeless slavery.

I. *Who can discern his errors?* This is not so much a question, as an exclamation; since no man can possibly know all his involuntary faults. From these David passes to the class of sin which comes next in difficulty of discovery—hidden sins. These seem to cover two widely different kinds of transgression—sins practised secretly, and carefully hidden from others and sins that we fall into unawares; which are therefore, secret even from ourselves (cf. Ps. xc. 8). It is evidently only the latter to which David refers. It is a disquieting thought that we are blind to many of our own failings. Our friends see them, God knows them; and yet they may remain hidden from us. We need to pray God the Holy Ghost to show us these sins, to bring them

home to our consciences, that we may repent of them, and strive to conquer them.

II. The other two classes—presumptuous and ruling sins—cover those offences which are wilful, and more or less deliberate. “Presumptuous” (in form the Heb. is masculine, and would therefore signify “the proud” or “bold,” but the context seems to require the neuter sense). Each can find out for himself what are his “presumptuous” sins. The most common form is a presuming upon God’s mercy ; and therefore putting off repentance and amendment of life. But there is yet another class, the worst of all—“ruling” sins. Those habits of sin which have obtained such mastery over our wills that we are “tied and bound by their chains,” and are powerless to resist them. How awful is such a state ! Yet with penitence there is deliverance even from these ; for one drop of the Precious Blood can cleanse us from all sin, can loose the bonds by which we are held captive.

III. After praying to be delivered from all the sins of the past, as enumerated in the preceding categories, David prays also most earnestly for the future, that his words and thoughts may be acceptable in the sight of God. He is not content only to pray that he may be kept from transgression in word and deed ; but he asks that his heart may be so cleansed from sin, and entirely dedicated to God, that even his thoughts (and the words to which they give rise) may be pleasing to God. What an example to us ! First, of searching self-examination. Then, of renewed dedication to God of our whole life, and especially of the thoughts and words from which our actions flow. *Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my Rock, and my Redeemer.*

OUR HEART'S DESIRE

"The Lord . . . grant thee thy heart's desire, and fulfil all thy counsel."—PSALM xx. 4.

"Thou hast given him his heart's desire, and hast not withholden the request of his lips."—PSALM xxi. 2.

THESE two Psalms are closely linked together, as is evident from the two passages above. The former is a Litany before David went forth to battle. The latter is a *Te Deum* on his victorious return.

I. The heart's desire. What a beautiful expression, and how full of tremendous significance ! For desire is the mainspring of life, that which keeps in action all the intricate machinery of our daily life. As desire dies down in the heart the energies of life grow weak ; and, if it were possible for desire to cease entirely, our life would come to a standstill, like a watch with a broken main-spring.

The heart's desire. It is not only the main-spring of life, but the index of character. We cannot judge of a man's character only by what he says and does. If we do, we shall often be deceived. But if we know what he desires to say or do, or, better still, what he desires to have—in a word, if we know the desire of his heart, we shall be in possession of the key to that man's character, we shall know the secret of his life.

II. *The Lord . . . grant thee thy heart's desire.* Is not this a rather dangerous wish, unless we know what that desire is ? The gratification of the heart's desire, for many, might be the very worst thing that could happen to them. There are not a few good men, whose desire, though earnestly pleaded in prayer, seems always to be refused. If they mean what they say in the Lord's Prayer—*Thy will be done*—they are satisfied that their desire should not be granted, but that, instead of it, God should give them the better gift of entire resignation to His holy will. Yet, on the other hand, Christ's promise with regard to prayer seems to justify this petition—*All things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive* (S. Matt. xxi. 22). For prayer by its very character contains the tacit limitation

that the thing asked for should be for our good, and in accordance with God's will. The conception our Lord sets forth in His model of prayer, the Our Father, implies the relationship of father and child, and that anything which is hurtful (and therefore not in accordance with our Father's will) cannot be granted.

III. If desire be the main-spring of life, it is also the soul of prayer. The most common fault in our prayers is not that we ask too much, not even that we desire that which is not good for us, but that our prayers so frequently do not represent our heart's desire. And this is the cause of their being so lifeless, and therefore so fruitless. Prayer without desire is but an empty form of words which lacks the spiritual impulsion necessary to carry it to the throne of grace.

All our desires are known to God, all our heart's secrets are open to His eye. We need therefore to pray, "Almighty God, unto Whom all hearts be open, all desires known, and from Whom no secrets are hid ; Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of Thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love Thee, and worthily magnify Thy holy Name." This must be the spirit of every prayer. If it be, God will answer our prayer by "giving us more than either we desire or deserve." But we **must** keep in mind that, if there be one action of our life in which absolute sincerity is essential, it is prayer. We may deceive our neighbour about our religious earnestness, we may even deceive ourselves, but we can never deceive God. He knows our heart's desire better than we do ; let us see to it that our petitions be such as He may be able to grant.

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

“*The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want. . .*”—
PSALM xxiii. 1-3.

THE twenty-third Psalm has been termed “The nightingale of the Psalter.” “It is small, of a homely feather, singing shyly out of obscurity; but it has filled the whole world with melodious joy greater than the heart can conceive.” These are almost the first words of David, for they were written when he was a shepherd boy minding his father’s flock. Among his last words we find, *He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure; for it is all my salvation and all my desire* (II Sam. xxiii. 5). From the beginning to the end of his life, God was his Desire and his Salvation. This Psalm follows after the twenty-second, the Psalm of the Passion, the Psalm of the Cross; for there are no green pastures, no still waters on the wrong side of the Cross.

I. *The Lord is my Shepherd.* We have the fullest explication of this Psalm in our Lord’s allegory of the Good Shepherd (S. John x. 1-16). We learn there of the tender care and self-sacrificing love of Christ. His sheep can never want for anything; for He feeds them with His flesh and blood. He knows His own sheep by name. He knows all my weaknesses, trials, and sorrows; all my temptations, all my sins; He sees all my desires and all my needs. And He has proved His love for me by His death upon the Cross to redeem me. Therefore He will not let me lack those things which are for my good—grace to strengthen me, food to sustain me, and guidance lest I go astray.

II. *He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters* (v. 2). The allegory of the Good Shepherd was uttered at a crisis in our Lord’s ministry, when the authorities of the Jewish Church had formally excommunicated any man that should confess Him to be the Christ (S. John ix. 22). Christ, therefore, invites those who have been driven from the Synagogue to take refuge in His new Kingdom, the conditions,

privileges and responsibilities of which He sets forth in allegory. The green pastures of David foreshadowed the fold of Christ's Church. "Green," as constantly refreshed by the dews of the Holy Ghost, and as being shaded from the scorching heat of temptation. The Fathers, who mostly refer this Psalm altogether to the sacraments, see in the "waters of comfort" Baptism ; in the "oil" the chrism of Confirmation ; and in the "cup" the Holy Eucharist. Well may those who are in the fold of Christ, and have experienced its blessings say, *The Lord is my Shepherd : therefore can I lack nothing.*

III. *He restoreth my soul : He guideth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake* (v. 3). The first clause may be taken of the sad falls of those who have been admitted to full communion in the Church, but have succumbed to the force of temptation, and have been temporarily separated from God by mortal sin. It tells of the restoration to grace through penitence and absolution. The latter clause tells of God's guidance of His children through the manifold changes and chances of this mortal life. *The paths of righteousness* are those trodden by the feet of Christ, in which all who have taken up their Cross are bidden to follow (S. Matt. x. 38). To follow, for He goes before them, as the Good Shepherd—*When he hath put forth all His own, He goeth before them, and the sheep follow Him* (S. John x. 4). There is no path of sorrow or suffering which He has not trod, and in which He does not still go before them. The obstacles we have to meet and overcome, the trials we have to bear, are many and diverse ; but the paths we are to tread have this common feature, that they are all paths of righteousness. How can we find them ? How recognize them when found ? This need give us no concern. We have not to find, but only to follow Jesus. He finds us, and says *Follow Me*. And then, to the end of our life, He *leads* us. Our only anxiety must be to hear His voice, and to follow Him (cf. S. John x. 3). He will lead us through all the dangers of life, through the dark river of death, to the Gates of Heaven, to our Father's House.

THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me: Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me."—PSALM xxiii. 4.

WHAT is this life but a valley of shadows? It has its mountains, the heights of exaltation, spiritual or material, of religious enthusiasm or worldly success. It has also its valleys, in which we experience the depths of sorrow and suffering, mental or moral, of the disappointments and failure of human hopes, of the withdrawal of spiritual consolations, and of the pain of wounded affections. But, always and everywhere and upon every one, there is one shadow, which lengthens as the evening of life draws nearer—the shadow of death. The new-born babe in its cradle is not exempt from this shadow; since that is the only thing about its future which can be predicted with absolute certainty—it will die.

I. This verse has been the comfort of many a death-bed; and each word in it is full of significance. *Yea, though I walk*. For, indeed, he who walks with God during life need fear no evil in the hour of death. He has but reached the porch of his Father's House, through which he will enter into eternal rest. It has been said, that when there is a shadow, there must be light somewhere; and so there is here; for *The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear* (Ps. xxvii. 1). The mountains over which we have passed may be bleak and barren; but in the valleys are the golden sheaves laid up for eternity—*Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; for their works follow with them* (Rev. xiv. 13).

II. *Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me*. The rod of chastisement, when we err from the paths of righteousness. God's chastisements are not in anger, but in love, not merely to punish, but to bring us back to the right way—*Thy gentleness hath made me great* (Ps. xviii. 35). God's visitations are often among His greatest mercies—*According to the multitude of Thy mercies do away mine offences*

(Ps. li. 1). The staff is to support us in the pilgrimage of life, to help us to bear the trials and temptations which are the lot here even of God's most faithful servants. We cannot endure them in our own strength, but with the staff that Christ gives us we are able to sustain all the afflictions and adversities which may befall us. It has been noted that the rod and the staff together form the Cross ; so that this is but a foreshadowing of the Christian doctrine of the way of the Cross, as the only road to Christ's kingdom (cf. *De Imitatione*. lib. II. 12).

III. *Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil ; for Thou art with me.* On account of this verse the Psalm is used in the Office for the dead (Nocturn II, Gregorian Breviary, and the Office for the Burial of a Priest in the Greek Church).

What is this life ? Surely the valley of the shadow of death ; for it is thither that the paths of righteousness bring us. Mystical writers see in the grave, the fold in which the Good Shepherd pens His sheep until the morning of the Resurrection. He Himself has tasted death, and for a short time has rested in this valley, from whence on Easter Day He brought forth the prisoners of hope (Zech. ix. 11), the patriarchs and saints of the Old Covenant. The whole Psalm, in the light of this verse, may be taken of the Intermediate State, where in green pastures the blessed dead are resting, till the Good Shepherd leads them forth into the paths of eternal righteousness, the streets of gold of the heavenly Jerusalem, and to the Beatific Vision—*The nations (of them that are saved) shall walk amidst the light thereof* (Rev. xxi. 24).

THE ACT OF PRAYER

"Unto Thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul. O my God, in Thee have I trusted."—PSALM XXV. 1, 2.

PRAYER is the first essential to spiritual life. For prayer is the atmosphere which the soul breathes ; and you might as well expect to find a living man, who does not breathe, as a living Christian, who does not pray. But what is prayer ? It contains so many elements that it is difficult to frame a definition which will include them all. Some say, Prayer is telling God our wants. Yes, but this, at best, covers only one element of prayer ; and sometimes, when, for instance, there is no real desire that God's will should be done in granting or refusing our petition, it is not prayer at all. Our text sets forth the essential element of prayer. It is *the uplifting of the soul to God*. It is the link which connects us with God, the ladder by which we climb up to the very heart of God. Let us analyse an act of prayer, resolving it into its constituent parts. They are three : First, one who shall make the prayer ; then, One to Whom it is made ; lastly, a communication between the two.

I. For a being to be capable of praying he must possess two attributes. He must be rational and consciously dependent. To the gift of reason must be added that of religion ; for it is religion, more than reason, that distinguishes man from the brute. In the brute there are glimmerings of reason in what we call instinct ; but there is not the slightest sign of religion. Religion is the new beginning in man, as life is in the animal kingdom ; and to ignore religion in man is to ignore that which entirely differentiates him from all the lower creation. Then, too, there must be a sense of dependence which expresses itself in prayer.

II. The Being to Whom we pray must be possessed of three special attributes—Omniscience, Omnipotence, and Love. That is, He must have a complete knowledge of our circumstances and our needs : He must hear our prayer. Then He must have power to help us to the uttermost. And, lastly, He must have a love, which in all

cases makes Him to will to give to His children all those things which are for their good.

III. The act of prayer. This is a movement from beneath, mind rising to mind, dependence to Omnipotence. All three parts of prayer are represented in Jacob's dream at Bethel. There was the patriarch on the earth beneath, the Lord God in Heaven above, and the ladder of intercourse between them. While this is, primarily, a type of the Incarnation, it also mystically sets forth the act of prayer. Again, we may trace in an act of prayer the working, in the suppliant, of the three theological virtues ; for prayer is essentially the exercise of Hope, and its foundation is Faith. *All things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive* (S. Matt. xxi. 22). And, further, Hope is the ladder by which the prayer of Faith ascends to Love ; for the exercise of fervent prayer should kindle in our hearts the flame of love, that thus our prayers may ascend as incense to the throne of God (cf. Ps. cxli. 2 ; Rev. viii. 3, 4).

Prayers are often futile because they are lacking in some one or more of these conditions. Most frequently, it is the failure to realize the Love of God. We believe in His Omniscience and Omnipotence, that He can help us ; but there is a doubt of His Love ; and this doubt invalidates the first condition of prayer—*Whatsoever ye ask, believing, ye shall receive*. We need to pray to God the Holy Ghost, Who is the Spirit of prayer, and Whose work it is to help our infirmity in prayer, by Himself making intercession for us (and in us), beseeching Him to quicken our faith, that we may be able to pray acceptably.

THE SECRETS OF THE LORD

"The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him ; And He will shew them His covenant."—PSALM XXV. 14.

THIS is one of the golden verses of the Psalter, and is best interpreted in the light of Christ's words to His Apostles, on the night before His death—*No longer do I call you servants ; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth : but I have called you friends ; for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known unto you* (S. John xv. 15).

It teaches us that there are degrees of nearness to God, and that those who give themselves to Him most unreservedly receive the great reward of a more intimate union with Him, involving a deeper and fuller knowledge of His counsels, and the joy of being counted among God's friends. Abraham was the first to whom this title was given (cf. Isa. xli. 8 ; S. James ii. 23). Moses was another (cf. Exod. xxxiii. 11) ; but all who fear God receive in some measure the privilege of Divine friendship.

I. The Hebrew word "sod" here translated "secret," may also be rendered "counsel" or "friendship." It implies a special intimacy and fellowship with God, and a revelation of hidden mysteries and purposes of God. We find in many places in H.S. a recognition of this. Noah walked with God, and God revealed to him His secret counsel to destroy the world, and to save him in the Ark (cf. Gen. vi. 9-22). Abraham walked with God, and God said, *Shall I hide from Abraham that which I do ?* (Gen. xviii. 17). Our Lord said to His disciples concerning His parables—*Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given* (S. Matt. xiii. 11). But it is S. Paul who tells us most fully of the secrets of God. It was he who was *caught up into Paradise, and heard unspeakable words* (II Cor. xii. 4). And who said, *We speak God's wisdom in a mystery, even the wisdom that hath been hidden. . . . But unto us God revealed it.* And again, *We have the mind of Christ* (I Cor. ii. 6-16). Moreover, as we study the Gospel of S. John, we feel (with

S. Bernard) that it was written by the beloved disciple, who knew the secrets of God.

II. It is very suggestive that this knowledge of the secrets of God should be here associated with those that fear Him. For, of the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, the lowest and foundation gift is Holy Fear, and the highest, in which the gifts culminate, is Wisdom. But Wisdom is that spiritual insight, that spiritual "taste," which recognizes God, and the things of God, not by the process of ratiocination, but by immediate intuition. While the sevenfold gift is possessed by all the baptized, each individual on account of his peculiar temperament generally appropriates and develops some one of these gifts more than the others ; and by its operation is enabled to render some special contribution to the edification of the Body of Christ. In this way the theologians of the Church have been produced—the moral theologians by the gift of Counsel, the dogmatic theologians by that of Understanding, and ascetic and mystic theologians by that of Wisdom.

III. Are we among those favoured ones who enjoy this gift of spiritual insight ? If not, why not ? Is it because we have never sufficiently cultivated the fear of God ? For this is the foundation upon which all the other gifts are built. Would it not be the greatest joy and the highest honour to be among the friends of God, to whom He communicates a knowledge of the mysteries of grace, and reveals the secrets of His Divine love ? As we read "The Imitation of Christ" by S. Thomas à Kempis, or "The Devout Life" by S. Francis de Sales, we feel that they had a deeper insight into the workings of God in the soul than is vouchsafed to most men. Let us then pray for that Divine wisdom, and lay in ourselves the foundation for it by cultivating the spirit of holy fear.

THE SUPREME DESIRE OF THE SOUL

"One thing have I desired (asked) of the Lord, that will I seek after ; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple."—PSALM xxvii. 4.

AMONG the most beautiful of the Psalms, this seems to have been written at a time when David was pursued by enemies and shut out from the House of the Lord. It has been assigned either to the time of Absalom's rebellion or to the period of his earlier persecution by Saul. It consists of two parts :

I. An expression of assured confidence in Jehovah whatsoever enemies may threaten (vv. 1-6).

II. An earnest cry for help and comfort in present needs, out of which the soul rises to hopeful trust in God (vv. 7-14).

I. *One thing have I desired (asked) of Jehovah.* Many aims lead to distraction, and make concentration difficult. The man of one ruling idea, of one ever present desire, is, as a rule, the successful man, because all his thoughts and energies are directed to one end, all his powers concentrated on one supreme purpose. But what was the one thing David desired? To dwell in the House of the Lord all the days of his life, and to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple. This may be summed up as the desire for communion and fellowship with God, especially in God's House in the daily participation in the offering of the sacrifices appointed under the Law, and in the Psalmody to which he had himself so largely contributed. Here we have a great king, a successful warrior, and a wise ruler, though immersed in many duties, putting first, as his one desire and petition, the worship of God, not only because it was of supreme obligation but because it was the joy of his life.

II. How far is this the paramount desire of our life? We are privileged to join in offering a far greater sacrifice than that of David (the sacrifice of which his was but a type), the pleading of the memorial of Christ's precious death until His coming again. David's purpose in desiring

to dwell in the House of the Lord was twofold—to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple.

i. To contemplate the beauty of God—His moral attributes, His truth and mercy, His love and patience, His holiness and infinite compassion for His sinful children. In cultivating the sense of fellowship with God, it is of the greatest help to meditate upon the character of God as revealed in His attributes and in His dealings with us.

ii. And to inquire in His temple—to commune with Him of all that is in our heart, to tell Him of our perplexities, of our doubts and fears, of the difficulties and temptations which beset us, and to learn from Him how best to meet and overcome them.

III. But we must not confine the interpretation of this passage only to this life ; its true meaning is satisfied with nothing short of that *house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens* (II Cor. i. 1). This is the one thing needful, the one supreme desire of the soul, that when the storms and trials of life are over, our home may be in Heaven ; that in its courts we may behold the fair beauty of the Lord in the Beatific Vision, in which the intellect shall find its satisfaction, drinking as from a river the waters of life, and the heart shall be ravished in the contemplation of the infinite perfections of God, which fulfil the highest ideals of the soul's desire. Here many saints of God, now set free from the struggles of the flesh, desired that one thing all the days of their pilgrimage, there that desire shall be satisfied in that life, the true life, throughout eternity.

THE SOUL'S QUEST

(“*When Thou saidst,*) *seek ye My Face ; my heart said unto Thee, Thy Face, Lord, will I seek.*”—PSALM xxvii. 8.

SOME such introduction as the words in brackets seem needed to introduce the utterance of God, *Seek ye My Face*. In the Prayer Book version this is supplied by the clause, “my heart hath talked of Thee.” The response, *Thy Face will I seek* is, as it were, taken from the mouth of God that by thus laying before God His own words we may make our appeal to Him more irresistible. We are reminded of the similar response of the woman of Canaan, when with touching humility she overcame our Lord’s objection by taking up His own words, saying, *Yea, Lord ; even the dogs under the table eat of the children’s crumbs* (S. Mark vii. 28).

I. *Seek and ye shall find* (S. Matt. vii. 28) is one of the great laws of life. With regard to the things of this world it has, however, many exceptions ; for even the most diligent efforts are not always crowned with success. But in the spiritual kingdom of which Christ was then speaking, the promise is unconditional, or limited only by the feebleness or faithlessness of our quest. Of all the objects which claim our attention as desirable, the “summum bonum” is God Himself. For Him, and by Him, the soul was made and endowed with its capacity for happiness, that in Him alone it might find complete satisfaction. In the injunction, *Seek ye My Face*, we have therefore from God Himself the revelation of what ought to be the supreme quest of the soul—the only object worthy of its unceasing pursuit, the only possession which will completely and permanently content the soul of man.

II. *Seek ye My Face*. What is a face ? The index of character, the dial-plate whereon is registered the actions of life. How fascinating is the study of a human face ! not so much from its physical beauty as on account of the soul which it reveals, of the spiritual forces which light it up. It arrests our attention, it challenges our investigation, and it suggests to us wonderful possibilities of hidden

power. And the Face of God surely means the revelation of the infinite perfections of Him, Whom to know is to love ; for to know God is to love Him ; and to love Him is indeed to enjoy the fulness of life. We often lament that we love God so little. Is not the cause of this that we know God so imperfectly ? The remedy then is to be found in seeking more diligently to know God. S. Paul prays for the Philippians that their *love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all discernment* (Phil. i. 9) ; for by the increase of the knowledge of God the love of God is made to burn more brightly in us.

III. We have in this verse a beautiful example of a colloquy of a soul with God, such as should often find place in our meditations. Meditation, mental prayer, is the exercise of the principal powers of the soul, under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, upon the consideration of some truth of revelation. In connection with it we must remember that the Holy Spirit helps our infirmities in prayer, *making intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered*, that "the Spirit Himself bears witness with our *spirit that we are children of God* (cf. Rom. viii. 26, 16). And this is especially the case when we meditate. Then He teaches us to speak as children to our Heavenly Father, to tell Him of our trials and needs, but above all of our love ; and by His utterance in our souls He enables us to hear our Father's voice speaking to us in answer. This colloquy is one of the most blessed methods of communion with God ; for communion is more than the pleading of our desires, it is the listening for God's voice, and learning thus directly from Him the true wisdom of the spiritual life.

AN ACT OF THANKSGIVING

“Sing praise unto the Lord, O ye saints of His, and give thanks to His holy Name. For His anger is but for a moment ; in His favour is life : weeping may tarry for the night, but joy cometh in the morning.”—PSALM xxx. 4, 5.

THIS Psalm evidently seems to have been composed as a thanksgiving after recovery from very serious sickness. Its title “A Song of Dedication for the House by David” has led many to assign its composition to the dedication of the altar erected upon Araunah’s threshing floor, considering it therefore a thanksgiving for the removal of the three days’ pestilence (II Sam. xxiv. 21). But the fact that David escaped that pestilence, and the clear reference in the Psalm to the writer’s dangerous sickness, is inconsistent with that view. It is now used by the Jews at the Festival of Chanukah or Re-dedication of the Temple after its desecration by Antiochus Epiphanes. The Psalm falls into two divisions—first, a thanksgiving for recovery from sickness (1-5). Then, a record of the Psalmist’s experiences during his affliction (6-12).

I. This Psalm is of special value as an act of thanksgiving after delivery from great trial or affliction, whether material or spiritual. It has been used by thousands to express their deep gratitude for recovery from sickness which has brought them near to the gates of the grave ; and by multitudes of penitents returning thanks for deliverance from the bondage of sin, and for their restoration to the favour of God. Indeed, this and Psalm ciii may be regarded as the two great inspired acts of thanksgiving in the Church’s treasury of devotion.

II. The chief thought is the contrast between God’s anger against sin and God’s favour towards the returned penitent, and the effects of the latter upon the soul. The Hebrew of this verse is very terse and vigorous, and striking in its parallelisms. It may be rendered, “For in His anger is (but) a moment, in His favour a lifetime (or life) : in the evening weeping may come to lodge, but in the morning a shout of joy.” The trouble that God sends

is not sent for the sake of troubling us, but for our profit, and to bring us back to God (cf. II Cor. iv. 16, 17) ; for, when it has done its work, it is removed—*Before I was afflicted I went astray ; but now I observe Thy word. . . . It is good for me that I have been afflicted ; that I might learn Thy statutes are righteous, and that in faithfulness Thou hast afflicted me* (Ps. cxix. 67, 71, 75).

III. *Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing. . . . Thou hast girded me with gladness : to the end that my glory may sing praise to Thee and not be silent, O Lord my God, I will give thanks unto Thee for ever and ever* (vv. 11, 12). The joy of deliverance must not be a mere barren emotion, but must express its exuberance in lasting thanksgivings, not for a day or a week, but for ever and ever.

Mourning is turned into dancing ; for *they that sow in tears shall reap in joy* (Ps. cxxvi. 5). So Christ promised, *Ye shall weep and lament . . . ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy* (S. John xvi. 20). Both mourning and joy have their place in the spiritual life : the former in the work of penitence—*Blessed are they that mourn : for they shall be comforted* (S. Matt. v. 4) ; the latter is one of the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. v. 22) ; and S. Paul exhorts his spiritual children to rejoice (cf. Phil. iv. 4) ; for the oil of gladness is an important factor in the development of the soul, acting as the great lubricant which saves the machinery of life from much unnecessary friction, and enables it to run smoothly and without wasteful expenditure of energy.

AN ACT OF FAITH AND ITS FRUITS

"In Thee, O Lord, do I put my trust : let me never be put to confusion. . . ."—PSALM xxxi. 1-6.

THE first six verses of this Psalm are endeared to us as having formed one of the Compline Psalms, recited by the whole Western Church for some fourteen hundred years, and as containing Christ's last utterance upon the Cross. Night is a type of death, and its use at Compline doubtless arose from a feeling that the words with which our Lord closed the last day of His earthly life were the fittest with which His followers could close each day of their earthly pilgrimage. These verses have always been treated as a separate Psalm. They begin and they end with a great act of faith, or trust in God, the opening words of which have been appropriated verbatim for the triumphal conclusion of the Church's chief canticle of praise, the *Te Deum*—"In Te, Domine, speravi, non confundar in æternum."

I. *In Thee, O Lord, have I put my trust : let me never be put to confusion* (v. 1). All prayer is based upon an act of faith, expressed or implied ; for Christ makes faith a condition upon which depends the answer to prayer—*All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive* (S. Matt. xxi. 22). Is not lack of faith the cause of many of our unanswered prayers ? As S. James says, *Ye ask, and receive not because ye ask amiss* (iv. 3). Our prayers are lifeless because they are faithless ; frequently they are a mere form of words, we do not expect that they will be of any avail, and we are not really surprised at the non-fulfilment of our expectation. We need to pray with all our might, struggling, wrestling, in prayer with God, as our Lord did in Gethsemane, as Jacob did at Peniel ; but we can only pray thus if we believe that God cares for us and listens to our prayers, and that He will always grant them in such measure as may be most for our good.

II. The petitions which flow from this act of faith are four :

i. For deliverance. ii. For salvation. iii. For guidance. iv. For extrication from the toils of sin.

Each is preceded by an act of faith of which it is the fruit.

i. *Because I have put my trust in Thee, deliver me in Thy righteousness. Bow down Thine ear to me ; make haste to deliver me* (vv. 1. 2).

ii. *Be thou my strong rock, and house of defence* (strong rock, lit. a rock of stronghold, i.e., not a rock with a castle upon it, but a rock which is itself a stronghold ; house of defence, lit. a house of fortresses, a poetical expression for a fortified place) *that Thou mayest save me.*

iii. *For Thou art my strong rock and my castle* (fortress) : *be Thou also my Guide, and lead me for Thy Name's sake.*

iv. *Draw me out of the net that they have laid privily for me : for Thou art my strength* (stronghold).

III. Having prayed for his four great needs, the Psalmist concludes with another and still more sublime act of faith—*Into Thy hands I commend my spirit : for Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord Thou God of truth* (v. 6). These words with which our Lord ended His earthly life provide us with a most perfect act of trust and resignation, for use on all occasions of danger and difficulty, and especially for a commendation of ourselves to God at the end of each day, and on the final day of our life. Let us examine them. Into Thy hands, those hands that made me. I commend what ? Not my soul, or my life (nephesh) but my spirit (ruach). The child of God is not so much concerned about his bodily life, that it may be preserved from sickness and death ; but for the life of his spirit, which is much more precious, that it may be preserved from sin, and from all spiritual enemies, against the day of Christ's coming. It was for this that S. Paul prayed, when he wrote, just before his death, *I know Him Whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to guard that which I have committed unto Him* (τὴν παραθήκην μου) *against that day* (II Tim. i. 12). The deposit to which S. Paul refers is himself, body, soul, and spirit, and the day is the day of Christ's second coming to judge the world. Let us therefore every night commend our spirit to God, as Christ commended His spirit to His Heavenly Father when dying upon the Cross, and as we desire at the hour of our death to commend ourselves into the loving hands of God.

GOD'S CLAIMS FOR PRAISE

*“Rejoice in the Lord, O ye righteous : praise is comely for the upright. Give thanks unto the Lord with the harp : sing praises unto Him with the psaltery of ten strings.”—*PSALM xxxiii. 1, 2.

THE constructional lines of this Psalm are clear and simple. It consists of an introduction, setting forth reasons why God should be praised (vv. 1-5) ; and three aspects of God's work in the spheres of Creation (6-9), of Providence (10-17), and of Grace (18-22). In the introduction God is shown to be worthy of praise on account of His character and work—His word is true, His fidelity certain, His goodness is everywhere manifest : therefore it is the duty and privilege of His saints to praise Him. Joy is the soul of praise ; hence we are called upon to rejoice in the Lord ; and to use as instruments of praise the accompaniment of harp, psaltery, and other musical instruments (cf. Ps. cl.).

I. All Creation calls upon us to praise God. The manner in which all things were brought into being is revealed—*By the word of the Lord were the heavens made ; and all the hosts of them by the breath of His mouth* (v. 6). “Breath” (ruach) denotes especially the source of life in God's creative work, as His “Word” is that which summons all things into existence. We have here a prophetic adumbration of the final revelation of the Word Who is the Wisdom and Power of God, and of the Holy Spirit Who is the Giver of life (cf. also Ps. cxlviii. 18), where we have a similar foreshadowing of the respective work of the Second and Third Persons of the Holy Trinity).

For He spake and it was done ; He commanded and it stood fast (v. 9). It has frequently been pointed out that “He spake” is said of God instead of “He did ;” because by His Word His creative power is exercised—*All things were made by Him : and without Him was not anything made that hath been made* (S. John i. 3). As the Creator of all, all must praise Him. On account of the majesty of His power, all must fear Him (cf. v. 8). All creatures bear witness to God's Wisdom, Power, Mercy, and Love ; and call upon man to praise God.

II. We should praise God for the operations of His Providence, of His counsel for man—He bringeth to naught the counsel and devices of irreligious powers, but by His counsel orders the circumstances of nations and of individuals. We see the workings of this in the history of nations, as it enables each to contribute some important idea of truth to the building up of humanity. The Jews witnessed to the truth of the Unity and Aseity* of the Godhead, and to the sanctity of the moral law. The Egyptians to a belief in man's immortality. The Greeks to the idea of beauty. The Romans to that of order, etc. Each great nation has had its mission to the world in accordance with God's Providence. That same Providence orders also the lives of individuals—He *fashioneth the hearts of them all* (v. 15). Things do not happen by chance : the blessings and prosperity, as well as the trial and afflictions of our lives, are ordered by God for our ultimate good ; and with each, grace is given to use them rightly, so that they may work in us God's loving purpose.

III. Above all, we ought to praise God for His gifts of grace ; for in them His goodness and love are mostly perfectly manifested—*Behold, the Eye of the Lord is upon them that fear Him, upon them that hope in His mercy* (v. 18). S. Albertus Magnus sees here, in the first clause, a promise of God's protection in this life ; and, in the next, of His salvation in the world to come. He goes on to make an ingenious application of the Mosaic law, saying, " Hope and fear are the two millstones between which a man's soul is ground that it may become contrite ; and therefore the Law forbids (cf. Deut. xxiv. 6) that either the upper or lower millstone shall be taken in pledge, neither being of use without the other." *To deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine* (v. 19). The Hand of the Lord goes with His Eye. Where He sees His children in need or distress, His Hand is stretched forth to help them. Mediæval commentators take this of the Eucharist, whose principal virtues are deliverance from temptation and eternal death, and food and refreshment in the wilderness of this world (cf. S. John vi. 4, 49-51).

* That God is Self-derived.

THE GUARDIANSHIP OF ANGELS

"The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him."—PSALM xxxiv. 7.

ON account of this verse, Psalm xxxiv finds place in all the principal Breviaries (Gregorian, Monastic, and Parisian) as one of the Proper Psalms for Michaelmas Day. The best commentary on this passage is provided by three Scriptural instances of its application.

I. Jacob wrestling with the angel at Peniel. The chapter begins with the statement—*And Jacob went his way, and the angels of God met him. And Jacob said when he saw them, This is God's host: and he called the name of that place Mahanaim* (Gen. xxxii. 1, 2), that is, two camps or companies; perhaps two bands of angels, one before welcoming him into Canaan; and another behind, conducting him from Mesopotamia; or it may have been, one on either side, signifying the completeness of his protection. This, however, is but introductory to the greater episode—the wrestling of Jacob with the angel of God (vv. 24-30). We have here a type of our Lord's agony in Gethsemane, when *there appeared unto Him an angel from heaven strengthening Him* (S. Luke xxii. 43). We behold therefore angels encamping around man on the occasion of a great crisis in his life, when serious peril is impending. Further, in the scene at Peniel, we see angelic intervention in connection with a great spiritual struggle with God, represented as a wrestling all night with "a man," called by Hosea (xii. 4) an angel, and by Jacob, God, the angel of Jehovah, Who had previously appeared to Abraham at Mamre.

II. Elisha's prayer—that his servant's eyes might be opened (when the Syrians surrounded Dothan), *and behold the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire around Elisha* (II Kings vii. 17). This vividly illustrates our text; for it reveals to us how angelic hosts do encompass and protect God's servants in time of special danger. To the mind of Elisha's servant the situation seemed hopeless. Dothan, in which they were dwelling, was entirely surrounded by the army of the King of Syria, who regarded

Elisha with bitterest hatred on account of his having so frequently brought to naught the attacks the king had planned against Israel by making known beforehand to King Jehoram his most secret plans. Elisha, however, saw God's angel-host around him, protecting the place, and at his prayer his servant was also enabled to behold these spiritual guardians.

III. The classical passage, however, is that quoted by Satan in our Lord's temptation in the wilderness—*He shall give His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands lest thou dash thy foot against a stone* (Ps. xci. 11, 12). The Fathers generally take this as teaching that at our birth (some say at our Baptism) God entrusts each of us to the care of a particular angel, whose office it is to keep and guard us in all our ways, that is, in the ways that God has appointed for us to walk in, but not in the evil ways of our own sinful choice. Moreover our Guardian bears us up when we stumble, lest we should fall into sin. He succours us in our temptations and dangers, and strives to guide us through the trials of this life to our heavenly inheritance. We find in Holy Scripture many instances of this ministry to individuals (e.g., Gen. xlviii. 16 ; Tobit xii. 12, 21 ; I Kings xix. 7 ; S. Matt. xviii. 10 ; Acts xii. 15).

What an inspiring thought—the angels are the body-guard of the citizens of heaven on their pilgrimage through the dangers of this world on the way home ! The realisation of this ought to be a great help and comfort in our spiritual life—a check when the Tempter solicits us to sin, an encouragement to steadfast resistance ; for we are not alone, our Guardian angel is with us.

THE WICKEDNESS OF THE UNGODLY

"The transgression of the wicked saith within my heart, There is no fear of God before his eyes."—PSALM xxxvi. 1.

IN this exquisite little Psalm we find two pictures, drawn with great fidelity, which exhibit the striking contrast between the characteristics of the wicked and the love and truth of Him Who is at all times our defence against sin.

I. *Saith within my heart.* Whose heart? The heart of the writer who, in the title, describes himself as the servant of the Lord. So strange does this seem that some have altered the text, and substituted "his heart" for "my heart." But what a great lesson is lost thereby! For it is the motions of sin within God's servants, the evil thoughts suggested by Satan, their many temptations, that teach them that were it not for the grace of God, they might be thinking and doing just what the wicked think and do. It is the study of the possibilities of evil within the heart of the best of us that enables us to say, when we hear of another's grievous fall, But for the grace of God that might have been my fate. As S. Gregory of Nyssa writes, "Where there is no fear of God to restrain, the Devil holds festal dance with sin."

II. For he flattereth in his own eyes, that his iniquity shall not be found out and be hated (v. 2). Here, surely, we have an anticipation of our Lord's characterization of the Pharisees—*Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which outwardly appear beautiful, but inwardly are full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness* (S. Matt. xxiii. 27). What this meant is perhaps best seen in their action when, having brought to Christ a woman taken in adultery, *He said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. . . . And they, when they heard it, went out one by one, beginning from the eldest, even unto the last* (S. John viii. 7-9). They flattered themselves that their iniquity would not be found out, but in Christ's presence their consciences convicted them. *He flattereth himself in his own*

eyes (v. 2). Does not this imply that self-justification which is really self-deception, which trifles with and perverts the conscience until it is rendered only the echo of a man's own desires.

III. *The words of his mouth are iniquity and deceit : He hath left off to be wise and to do good. He deviseth iniquity upon his bed : he setteth himself in a way that is not good ; he abhorreth not evil* (vv. 3, 4).

He hath left off, etc. Then once he must have walked in the path of righteousness, and now had deserted it. How many of the ungodly begin well ; but they cast off their first robe, the robe of grace, and prefer the fig-leaves of flattery and false excuses.

He deviseth iniquity upon his bed. Not content with working for his master the Devil all day, such a man devotes even the hours of the night, the time of rest, to devising new deeds of evil.

He setteth himself in a way that is not good. This shows that his sinful life is not merely the result of yielding to overpowering temptation, but that it is his deliberate choice. "He setteth himself" implies resolution and will to do wrong. The iniquity he had devised upon his bed in the darkness of the night, he sets himself to carry out in the full light of day. *He abhorreth not evil.* On the contrary, he loves it, and makes it the chief pursuit of his life.

What a fearful portrait of an ungodly man these few verses bring before us. Instead of seeking among our acquaintances examples of such wickedness, we should look into our own hearts, realizing the possibilities of sin within us, and earnestly praying that we may be delivered from all self-deception, and by God's grace be enabled to set our faces steadfastly in the right way, and that by His continual help, we may persevere in our course heavenward.

CHRIST THE LIFE AND CHRIST THE LIGHT

"They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of Thy house ; And Thou shalt make them drink of the river of Thy pleasures. For with Thee is the fountain of life : In Thy light shall we see light."—PSALM xxxvi. 8, 9.

FROM the terrible portrait of an ungodly man (vv. 1-4), the Psalmist turns, with a quick revulsion of feeling, to a description of the loving-kindness, the faithfulness, and the righteousness of Jehovah. The inspired words that follow are best regarded as the utterance of our humanity in Christ, looking up to the glories of His future Ascension, since this Psalm, succeeding as it does the previous Passion Psalm, tells us of its fruits in the glorious resurrection of Christ and His wonderful ascension into Heaven.

I. *For with Thee is the fountain of life ; In Thy light shall we see light.* The Fathers see here a marvellous reference to the Holy Trinity. For with Thee, the Father, of Whom are all things, is the fountain of life. With Thee, as it is written, *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God* (S. John i. 1). The Word Who said, *I am the Life* (S. John xiv. 6). And *in Thy light shall we see light*—the Spirit of Truth Which proceedeth from the Father ; for this is the basis of that clause in the Nicene Creed—Light of light. It has been said that "these are some of the most wonderful words of the O. T. The fulness of their meaning no commentary can ever exhaust. They are in fact the kernel and the anticipation of much of the profoundest teaching of S. John." Christ is the Fountain of Life (both animal and spiritual). God only has life in Himself, Life underived, as Christ says, For as the Father hath life in Himself, even so gave He to the Son also to have life in Himself (S. John v. 26). S. Augustine writes, "Who is the Fountain of life but Christ ? And He Who is the Fountain is also the Light." These two figures (of fresh water and light) are applied to Christ in the Apocalypse. For there the Lamb leads to living Waters, and He is the Light of the heavenly city (cf. Rev. vii. 17 ; xxi. 23).

II. *How precious is Thy loving-kindness, O God ! And the children of men take refuge under the shadow of Thy wings* (v. 7). From God, the Source of Life and Light, we pass now to the supreme act of His love—that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life (S. John iii. 16). The Father gave Him, first, in the Incarnation, that He might live for man ; then upon the Cross He gave Himself to die that man might live ! And under the shadow of His wings, those dear arms wide-stretched to embrace and protect all that come to Him, we find a refuge from all our foes. And what a refuge ! a house of rest and refreshment, where we feed upon His most holy body, the cake baken on the coals, in the fires of the Passion, where we may drink of His most precious blood, as out of a river—not like Elijah's brook, Cherith, which in process of time dried up, but from an inexhaustible river, the fountain foretold by Zechariah (xiii. 1), for the cleansing of sin, the river of inebriating pleasures ; since the cleansing of the precious blood frees from the bondage of sin and makes us partakers of the glorious liberty of Christ, uniting us to Him. What joy can be greater than this ? Well may we pray (in the *Anima Christi*), Blood of Christ, inebriate me.

III. And so the Psalm ends with the prayer that God's loving-kindness may continue unto us, who know Him in the revelation of His Son, that the foot of pride may not prevail against us, and that the hand of the wicked may never succeed in driving us away from Him. That with the awful example of the wicked before us, we may never follow in their ways, but that in the house of God we may find our joy on earth, and hereafter we may attain to our home in heaven.

PERFECT TRUST IN GOD

“Trust in the Lord, and do good ; So shalt thou dwell in the land and feed securely (margin). Delight thyself also in the Lord ; And He shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the Lord ; Trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass.”—PSALM xxxvii. 3-5.

TERTULLIAN calls this Psalm “The Mirror of Providence”; since it has for its theme the vindication of God’s Providence in His administration of the world. The counsel of the Psalmist is to wait, to trust in the Lord, to look to the end, and to notice that even in this life God manifests His justice in the reward of the righteous and the punishment of the wicked.

I. *Trust in the Lord, and do good.* “*Spera in Domino,*” as the Vulgate renders it, was the motto of a powerful monarch, King Manoel of Portugal ; and it is a good maxim for every Christian. When facing the stormy billows over which we have to pass in our voyage through life, the first thing is to build an ARK OF HOPE in which we may find safety during the cataclysms of the world. But this Ark must not be constructed of the delusive hopes of human promise, but of hopes anchored upon the Everlasting, Unchanging Lord. Hope alone, however, is not enough, it must be accompanied by action—Hope *and* do good. There are many who say they hope in the Lord, but they make that an excuse for doing nothing else. Hope in the Lord and do good, and you have the promise that the Lord shall give thee thy heart’s desires (cf. v. 4).

II. So far, the difficulties and disappointments of life have been met by three precepts—Do not fret about them, hope, trust in the Lord, and do good. Before further counsels are given, certain fruits are promised as the result of the observance of these precepts—*So shalt thou dwell in the land and feed securely.* To David, the land meant Canaan, the land of the Covenant ; but S. Thomas Aquinas takes it, for the Christian, of that land of which Canaan was but the type, the land of the saints, our own true country where are the many mansions prepared for us by Christ. S.

Augustine, however, sees in it the Church of Christ. Whichever it be, there is the further promise that we shall feed securely : in the Church on the bread of angels, the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ ; in Heaven on the Beatific Vision, at once continual hunger and continual satiety.

III. *Delight thyself also in the Lord ; And He shall give thee the desires of thine heart*, etc. It has been pointed out that the order of these words makes all the difference between a religion of selfishness and a religion of love. The Lord will give you what your heart is set on ; therefore delight in Him is the former—a serving God for His gifts. So Satan said of Job, *Doth Job serve God for naught* (Job i. 9). But, if we love God for Himself alone, if we delight in Him for what He is, not for what He gives, then He becomes to us the Fountain of happiness, the supreme object of our heart's desire. There is a legend that, when S. Thomas Aquinas had finished that portion of his "Summa" which treats of the Blessed Sacrament, our Lord appeared to him, and said, Thou hast written well of Me, Thomas, What shall I give thee ? S. Thomas replied, "Non nisi Te, Domine" (Lord, do not give, unless Thou give Thyself).

He must be the treasure of our soul. With Him we have all that we can desire, and are rich with all the riches of God Himself. Without Him, though we had all the wealth of the whole world, we should be poor indeed. Pray daily that you may learn this, and you will possess the joys of heaven now, as well as in eternity.

THE REST OF THE SOUL

“*Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him.*”—PSALM xxxvii. 7.

IN all the ages that have passed since these words were written, to how many troubled souls have they not brought comfort and peace? And yet, perhaps, there has never been an age when they were so much needed as our own. It is the custom to speak of our day as a busy age ; it might more correctly be called a restless age, the most restless age man has ever known ; therefore this passage, preaching as it does the Gospel of Rest, has a special message to the unquiet world in which we find ourselves to-day. The best commentary on it is contained in Christ's loving invitation, *Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me ; for I am meek and lowly in heart : and ye shall find rest for your souls* (S. Matt. xi. 28-29).

I. We need physical rest. We are so constituted that a very large part of our life is necessarily passed in sleep. In the early years of childhood more than half of our time is thus spent ; and even after we have grown to man's estate most of us devote nearly a third of our days to recruiting our wearied bodies by slumber. And of the ailments to which we are subject we reckon persistent insomnia among the most wearisome and the most dreaded.

We need also, scarcely less, mental rest, the recruiting of the body and mind. This, of course, is partly supplied by sleep. but not entirely ; and rest and recreation of the mind is with most of us a condition of effective intellectual effort. It has been recognized, even by those without religious bias, that one day in seven is requisite in order to preserve the health and sustain the energy of our race. In the French Revolution the experiment was tried of one day of rest in ten, but it was not a success, and the sabbatical period was restored.

II. And yet neither of these is the rest of which the Psalmist speaks, *rest in the Lord*. That is a rest of the soul, a repose which includes more than refreshment of mind,

a rest of the highest part of our nature, made for God, and restless until it rests in Him. The restlessness of our age is partly mental, but largely moral, the unquiet craving for a satisfaction of the soul which can never be found in the world. It is this that God alone can supply—*Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him*. “Rest,” lit. “Be silent” with reference to God and to His will. Rest here is a word expressive of that calm resignation which leaves itself absolutely in the hands of God. In this we find the best cure for dissatisfaction with the present and for anxiety about the future, that we leave both in the hands of God. But this rest involves chiefly two things.

i. Reconciliation. The soul must be at peace with God, not at enmity with Him : there must therefore be freedom from all wilful sin which could mar the intercourse of the soul with Him.

ii. Further, there must be perfect submission to God’s will ; this does not mean the annihilation of our will, but the calm energy of the will placing all in God’s hand. Christ in Gethsemane was not merely passive : the whole force of His will and purpose was gathered up in these words—*Not My will, but Thine, be done* (S. Luke xxii. 42).

III. We must notice that this restful, trustful spirit is put in contrast with “fretting.” It is our work not to worry but to trust God, realizing that whatsoever our trials may be, they are known to God, and permitted by Him in infinite wisdom ; and are therefore consistent with God’s love for us. Moreover, that their purpose is to *prove* and to *improve* us, and that we shall eventually recognize this either in this world or in the next.

SINS OF SPEECH

"I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue : I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me."—PSALM xxxix. 1.

THE inspired commentary on these words is contained in S. James iii. 1-12 ; which should be read carefully before meditating upon them—*If any stumbleth not in word, the same is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body also.*

I. *I said.* It was to himself that he said it, he had been reasoning with himself in a time of great mental disturbance and indignation, and this was the wise resolution which he made. How many a good man, burdened with an irritable temper, has said this, but how few have kept their resolution perfectly ! S. Gregory here points out that there are two ways in which we sin with the tongue—in speaking when we ought to keep silence or in saying what we ought not to say. But surely there is a third—in being silent when we ought to give utterance in defence of right, when it is a duty to speak out a word on God's side.

This was prophesied of our Lord in His Passion : *He was oppressed, yet He humbled Himself and opened not His mouth ; as a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep that before her shearers is dumb ; yea, He opened not His mouth* (Isa. liii. 7). And we see the fulfilment, when Jesus the Word of the Father stood silent before the judgment seats of both Herod and Pilate, *insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly* (S. Luke xxiii. 9 ; S. Matt. xxvii. 14). And we remember that our Lord warned His disciples, *Cast not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast your pearls before the swine, lest haply they trample them under their feet, and turn and rend you* (S. Matt. vii. 16).

II. The tongue is the instrument of self-revelation : by it an immortal soul, endowed by God with so many gifts, yet shut up within the human body, reveals itself to other souls, and brings to bear upon them the forces of good and evil which form its character. A statesman has cynically said that "speech was given to enable us to conceal our thoughts." But underlying this statement is,

of course, the implication that this man's words were generally false, since they did not represent his thoughts. It is not sufficient, however, that our words shall be the true exponents of what we think and feel; we must, if we are to use speech aright, see to it that our thoughts and feelings also are true and right; so that our words may convey to others the forces of a sanctified nature. They ought to reveal ourselves. Realizing therefore our great responsibility for the gift of speech, we must make every effort so to purify our hearts that our words may bring to others the gracious influence of a holy character. *And all bare Him witness, and wondered at the words of grace which proceeded out of His mouth* (S. Luke iv. 22). This is the first recorded criticism of our Lord's words; and when upon the Cross He had uttered His last words, the centurion bare witness, saying, *Certainly this was a righteous man* (S. Luke xxiii. 47).

III. The special temptation which the Psalmist experienced was to utter rash and hasty words with regard to the wicked. A great many of our sins of the tongue are probably the expression of uncharitable judgments concerning those whom we dislike, or those who have wronged us. We should therefore be very careful to keep a bridle upon our mouth in the presence of such temptations. There are three good rules to be observed on such occasions—to ask ourselves, Is what I am going to say true? Is it necessary? Is it kind? And unless we can answer to each, Yes, we should keep silence.

THE NUMBER OF MY DAYS

"My heart was hot within me ; while I was musing the fire kindled : Then spake I with my tongue : Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is ; Let me know how frail I am."—PSALM xxxix. 3, 4.

THIS Psalm has been termed "The most beautiful of all elegies in the Psalter." It has fitly been appointed for use in our Prayer Book in the Burial of the Dead. The Psalmist is perplexed by his suffering, he does not understand the meaning of his chastisement. He would have expostulated with God, like Job, but he fears, lest while telling his perplexities some word may drop from him which may give occasion to the wicked to speak against God. Therefore he resolves to keep his mouth as with a bridle, but his heart is hot within him, and at last he speaks, not to make complaint but to pray that he may know, that is, may realize what is so obvious—the fact of the brevity and frailty of life.

I. This prayer, which seems so unnecessary, is a wise one ; for the one absolutely certain fact of life—its shortness and uncertainty—is the one thing that the great majority of men put out of their thoughts and refuse to face. Before our eyes every day is the evidence of this. We cannot take up a daily newspaper without finding in it a list of those who have died the previous day. Many of them men and women in the hey-day of life. Life is short, frail and uncertain : brief at the longest (cf. Ps. xc. 10) ; carrying within it the seeds of decay and dissolution ; and so uncertain that the strongest life may in a moment snap like a thread or be torn up like a tree in a great storm. Everyone knows this, but how few realize that it is true of themselves ! All men think all men are mortal but themselves.

II. The Psalmist's prayer, however, is not for anyone else but for himself—Lord, make *me* know *mine* end, and the measure of *my* days ; let me know how frail *I* am. The teaching here prayed for is not to certify us of a fact which everybody knows—and forgets ; but to

enable us to learn its lessons. They are many, but among them are two most evident :

i. That it is foolish to anchor our hopes on a life so frail, on a treasure that can only be enjoyed in a world we must leave so soon.

ii. That it is unwise to put off till to-morrow any work, especially if it be work for God, that can be done to-day ; since to-morrow may never be yours, and that work will never be done ; its reward therefore will be forfeited, and instead its neglect will have to be accounted for.

III. The question may be asked : What is the good of realizing the shortness and uncertainty of this life ? Surely, the answer is that it may help you to live as a " stranger and sojourner " (cf. v. 12 ; and I S. Peter ii. 11). The world is so very attractive even for good people : it is so beautiful and seductive ; it endeavours to persuade us to make it our home. But Christ said, *Let your loins be girded about, and your lamps burning ; and be ye yourselves like unto men looking for their Lord . . . that, when He cometh and knocketh, they may straightway open unto Him* (S. Luke xii. 35, 36). This attitude of waiting and watching, of expecting their Master's knock to summon them to leave this place of sojourn for their eternal home, is only possible for those who realize that they are strangers and pilgrims here, and that the time of their sojourn can be but short. For such, life here is a time of interest, as the day of opportunity in which are developed the faculties that will fit us for our life in eternity ; and death will be awaited with calmness, and welcomed with a solemn joy, as ushering us into the Presence of Him Whom here we have learned to love and to long for as the Supreme Good of the soul.

THE CHARTER OF THE POOR

"Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the Lord will deliver him in the day of evil."—PSALM xli. 1.

THIS Psalm seems to have been written by David during a season of recovery from serious sickness, in which he had experienced the hypocrisy and ingratitude of false friends. The fact that our Lord quotes a passage from it (S. John xiii. 18) as applying to His Passion has led the Fathers to expound it all of Christ, and to say Christ Himself speaks by David in this Psalm. Let us so consider it.

I. *Blessed is he that*, amidst the songs of the angels and from the beatitude of His own eternity, *considereth the poor*, that is, the fallen human race, of some of whom it is written, *Because thou sayest I am rich, and have gotten riches, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art the wretched one . . . and poor and blind and naked* (Rev. iii. 17). Others there are who are wiser and recognize their misery and sin, and smite upon their breasts, saying, *God, be merciful to me the sinner* (S. Luke xviii. 13). Christ then considered the poor, and took upon Himself their poverty, tasting of all their sorrows (cf. Phil. ii. 6-11), that He might deliver them.

Compare this verse with the opening verse of the first Psalm—*Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the wicked, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful*. There is but One to whom these words can be applied in their integrity, Christ the Son of Man. Here He is seen in His holiness, as in our text we behold Him in His compassion. But how was that fulfilled—*the Lord will deliver Him*? Surely, when in Gethsemane He prayed, *O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass away from Me* (S. Matt. xxvi. 39). But though it was not possible then, it was fulfilled later in His people; for He and His are one. For Himself He was not delivered; in His people He was.

II. S. Paul, in one of his most pregnant and illuminating utterances, sets before us Christ's self-sacrificing love as our example, saying, *For the love of Christ constraineth us;*

because we thus judge . . . He died for all, that they which live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto Him Who for their sakes died and rose again (II Cor. v. 14, 15).

We must, therefore, follow His example in considering the poor, and delivering him in the day of evil. Two words here need attention—"considereth" and "poor." The former may either mean to look upon with compassion or to deal wisely with the true wisdom of righteousness, to take an intelligent interest in, and to cherish a tender sympathy for the suffering. The latter includes the weak, the sick, the impoverished, the wretched. Here it evidently refers especially to the sick (cf. v. 3). *Thou makest* (lit. turnest, changest) *all his bed in his sickness* may be understood either of the smoothing and arranging of the pillows, etc., which gives relief and refreshment to the sufferer, or as thou changest all his bed, i.e., from sickness to health.

III. In the heathen world there was a callous indifference to poverty and suffering. But with the dawn of revelation merciful consideration for the poor and helpless is introduced (cf. Exod. xxiii. 11; Lev. xix. 10; xxv. 25; Deut. xv. 7); and later, the prophets taught that if this were neglected, men's external worship became an offence in God's sight (cf. Isa. i. 17; iii. 14; lviii. 5-11; Jer. xxii. 3). The duty enjoined in this Psalm Christ illustrated by His life, and, in the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats, taught to be the condition of receiving mercy and blessing at the day of Judgment—*Come, ye blessed of My Father . . . Depart from Me, ye cursed* (S. Matt. xxv. 34, 41).

THE SOUL'S CRY FOR GUIDANCE

“O send out Thy light and Thy truth ; let them lead me : Let them bring me unto Thy holy hill, and to Thy tabernacles. Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy.”—PSALM xliii. 3, 4.

THIS short Psalm is very generally regarded as a part of that which precedes it. In addition to the refrain at its end (v. 5), which occurs twice in Ps. xlii. (vv. 5 and 11), there is a striking coincidence between them both of language and thought ; e.g., Ps. xlii. 11 and xliii. 2 ; and the longing for the sanctuary (xliii. 3, 4) is also found in Ps. xlii. 4. Moreover the two Psalms are used together in the Synagogues at the great Festival of Tabernacles. In the Gregorian use this Psalm is appointed for Good Friday, and in the Latin use for Easter Eve ; it also forms the introit said by the celebrant at the foot of the altar before saying Mass.

I. Psalms xlii. and xliii. are among the eleven Psalms ascribed to the sons of Korah, and were probably written when David was fleeing from Absalom ; it is thought on the day before he crossed the Jordan. The first two verses tell of a time of great oppression, when David earnestly desired that God's light and truth might lead him back in safety to the sanctuary at Jerusalem. While this appears to have been the immediate occasion of the Psalm, David also here prays prophetically for that further deliverance from the darkness and oppression of the world which, in its fulness, was to come through the Incarnation ; for then, when darkness covered the earth, and gross darkness the people (cf. Isa. lx. 2), God sent forth His light and His truth, His only-begotten Son, Who said, *I am the Light of the world. . . . I am the truth* (S. John ix. 5 ; xiv. 6 ; i. 4). *Let them bring me unto Thy holy hill.* The pillar of fire and of the cloud, which led the Israelites through the wilderness into the promised land, was a type of this guidance, and there is perhaps also a reference here to the Urim and Thummim by which guidance in difficulty was obtained from God.

II. But is not this now the soul's cry, for guidance amid the darkness and deceitfulness of the world? especially is it our prayer at the time of communion—that He, Who then comes to us in the sacramental species, Who is the Light of the world and is the Truth, may lead us through all the perils and difficulties of life, and bring us to His holy hill, and to the altar of God—to the holy hill of Calvary where He offered the one sacrifice for the sins of the world, that sacrifice which is pleaded on the altar in every Eucharist; *for as often as ye eat this bread, and drink the cup, ye proclaim the Lord's death till He come* (I Cor. xi. 26).

III. *Why art thou cast down, O my soul? And why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise Him Who is the health of my countenance and my God* (v. 5).

And so we pass from prayer for guidance to an act of hope and faith. In the darkest of times, amidst the trials and temptations which so continually beset us, God is with us; nay, is in us, when we leave the altar; He has come to strengthen and refresh us with His most precious body and blood. He has come to be our Light, and to lead us, as He led His people of old, through the wilderness to the promised land—not to the earthly Canaan, however fair, but to that of which it was a type, to our own dear country, to the City of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, that city which *hath no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine upon it: for the glory of God did lighten it and the lamp thereof is the Lamb* (cf. Heb. xii. 22; Rev. xxi. 23).

THE MEMORIES OF THE PAST

"We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, what work Thou didst in their days, in the days of old."—PSALM xliv. 1.

THIS Psalm stands in the Psalter absolutely unique in one respect, that it records a time of extraordinary oppression and persecution, when Israel had been scattered (v. 11), defeated in arms (15, 16), had become a reproach among the nations (13, 14), counted as sheep for slaughter (11, 22). All this had happened to them from no fault of their own—They had not forgotten God, they had not dealt falsely with His covenant, their heart was not turned back, nor their steps declined from God's way (vv. 17, 18). Indeed, they were slain for their very fidelity to God, for their steadfastness in His commandments. Often before they had been punished for their sins: now, in spite of their sufferings, they were persevering in the service of God. There is only one period of Jewish history which answers to this, that of the Maccabees under the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes, King of Syria (B.C. 168; cf. I Macc. c, 1-6). To this period then we must assign this Psalm.

I. In their grievous affliction where do they look for strength and comfort? To the memories of the past, to the record of God's goodness to them in previous times of suffering. Let us then consider the position which memory occupies in the life of the individual and of the nation. Memory is the power of the soul which constitutes a man's individuality, the link that binds together the past and the present, that makes the old man and the child one. Without it there could be no continuity in life. There is, too, something similar to this in a nation's life. For its memories are the threads out of which its history is woven, the records of the stages of its growth. Human knowledge is largely based upon the experiences, that is, the memories of the past, which constitute a great store of treasure upon which we draw to guide us in the decisions of the present and in the paths we expect to tread in the future.

The memories of an individual and of a nation are among its most precious possessions.

II. The Bible is the great treasure-house of the memories of our race ; and the importance of studying them is one of its most impressive lessons. Its deepest and most precious teachings are bound up with the lives and examples, the trials and failures and victories, the prayers and spiritual experiences of men who lived and feared God thousands of years ago—the Faith of Abraham, the Laws of Moses, and the Psalms of David are the glorious inheritance of all God's people. And above all, our Lord consecrated this function of memory when, on the last night of His life, He said, *Do this in remembrance of Me*. The chief act of our religion is thus bound up with the memory of the past.

III. *All this is come upon us, yet have we not forgotten Thee* (v. 17). How wise was the writer of this Psalm ! In a time of overwhelming affliction he finds his comfort in recalling all that God had done for the nation in the past. So David in a time of great trouble says, *I call to remembrance my song in the night : I commune with mine own heart* (Ps. lxxvii. 6). In his affliction he recalls the song of joy he had sung in the past in recognition of God's mercy to him and His many deliverances in bygone years, and from these draws a lesson of hope and trust. Forgetfulness of the past is great ingratitude both to God and to our ancestors from whom we have inherited so much. It is one of the faults and dangers of our age, that it lives so entirely in the immediate future, which may never be realized ; and regards all that is old as obsolete. Yet in the amazing discoveries of our day we are but reaping where others ploughed and sowed. If all things were started afresh with every generation, life would soon lapse into barbarism. The Bolshevism which is threatening the world now is a striking proof of the dangers of breaking off entirely from the past.

GOD IS OUR REFUGE

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."—PSALM xlv. 1.

THESE and the two following Psalms are hymns of triumph, composed on the occasion of a great deliverance. Probably they all celebrate the same event, the sudden and miraculous destruction of the army of Sennacherib, King of Assyria, encamped under the walls of Jerusalem (II Kings xix). The Psalm is conceived in the spirit of Isaiah, and is coloured by his language (cf. xxxiii.). It consists of three strophes, each concluding with the *Selah*, and the two last with a refrain (vv. 7, 11). In the first, God is magnified as at all times a sure Refuge (vv. 1-3). In the second, the abiding presence of God is the cause of Zion's peace and of the discomfiture of her foes (vv. 4-7). In the third, all are invited to contemplate the great deliverance God has wrought, and God's exaltation is proclaimed (vv. 8-11).

I. *God is our refuge.* How many of God's saints of old have found this true ! But for us it has a new meaning, for we have in Jesus the Rock in Whose cleft side we can hide ourselves until the trouble which threatens is overpast. We are reminded of those two passages—*The rocks are a refuge for the conies*, and *The conies are but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks* (Ps. civ. 18 ; Prov. xxx. 26). The conies are among *the four things which are little upon earth but exceeding wise* (Prov. xxx, 24). We, too, are feeble, and if we are wise, we shall make Christ our refuge whenever danger is in sight. *And strength.* For what is my strength ? the grace of Him Who said to His servant, *My grace is sufficient for thee : for my power is made perfect in weakness.* And that servant was able to say, *I can do all things in Him that strengtheneth me* (II Cor. xii. 9 ; Phil. iv. 13). *Therefore we will not fear*, etc. (vv. 2. 3). How can we fear with such strength promised to us ? Though mountains of difficulty oppose our path, and floods of trouble threaten to overwhelm us, God is our strength, and He is Almighty.

II. There is a river the streams whereof make glad the

city of God (v. 4). S. Thomas Aquinas takes this of the river of grace which bursts forth from Mount Calvary. S. Ambrose and S. Bernard see rather the *River of Water of Life, bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb* (Rev. xxii. 1). Divine grace, like a smooth-flowing and never-failing river, supplies refreshment and life to those in the Church above as well as to those in the Church Militant. The former have passed beyond the reach of trouble, for they are in the tabernacles of joy, and rest in the dwellings of light. The latter need refreshment in their toil, renewal in their weariness, the healing of their wounds, and the cleansing of the stains on their garments ; and they find all these needs supplied by that river of grace that is ever flowing in Christ's Church.

III. *God is in the midst of her ; she shall not be moved : God shall help her, and that right early* (v. 5). He was in the midst of His ancient Church, communing with her representative from above the mercy-seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony (Exod. xxv. 22). He is in the midst of His Church now by His indwelling presence, guiding her through His Holy Spirit. He is in the midst of her in the Sacrament of the Altar. And He takes up His abode in each individual member of His Church at the moment of his baptism. His presence assures the security of the Church, when attacked by the forces of the world at the instigation of the powers of evil. *God shall help her ; and that right early* (lit. at the dawn of morning). How often in H.S. great deliverances have been wrought at dawn, especially the greatest of all, deliverance from the power of death by our Lord's resurrection on Easter morning !

THE GLORIES OF THE CHURCH

"Walk about Zion, and go round about her: Tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces; that ye may tell it to the generation following. For this God is our God for ever and ever: He will be our guide even unto death."—PSALM xlviii. 12-14.

THIS Psalm like the two preceding, is a hymn of triumph celebrating the deliverance of Jerusalem from a besieging army. Verse 3 suggests a confederacy of Kings, such as that of the children of Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir in the days of Jehoshaphat (cf. II. Chron. xx. 1, 23). And this is strengthened by the allusion to the destruction of the ships of Tarshish (v. 7), which took place in the reign of Jehoshaphat (II Chron. xx. 37; I Kings xxii. 48).

I. We have here an exhortation to examine carefully and frequently the character, privileges, and origin of the Church of God. Read her history, ponder her teachings, mark well her bulwarks, consider her palaces, see how strong and how fair she is; and then realize that this is not the work of man but of God. As you contemplate all that she is remember it is because such a God is our God for ever and ever. Put side by side with this Psalm the patriotic outburst of one of the greatest Greek orators, Pericles (cf. Thucydides ii. 43). He too invites an examination of his native city, Athens—her temples and statues, her beautiful walks, her docks, her arsenals, and her markets filled with the productions of all the world. He says, Frequent our theatres, and appreciate the surpassing excellence of our poets, and the taste and splendour of our scenic representations. There is in both the same patriotic and enthusiastic admiration of present grandeur, the same recollection of past glory. But there is one striking difference of spirit. The Greek thinks only of the men who achieved that glory and who embellished the city of their birth, whose right hand gave her victory again and again. The Jew, on the other hand, traces all the glory of his land, and all the success of her children, immediately

to God. With the one all is of man, with the other all is of God !

II. What is the lesson ? As we contemplate the glories of the Church, her splendid history, her long roll of saints and martyrs, of virgins and confessors, of theologians and sacred poets, of the world gradually won from heathenism to Christ, what is the lesson ? Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, But unto Thy Name give glory (Ps. cxv. 1). That all the glories of the Church are the work not of man but of God ; and that they call upon us to give praise and glory to Him, and above all, to be thankful that such a God is our God—a loving Father, guiding His children throughout their life, enlightening their minds, pardoning their faults, strengthening their weakness, blessing their works, and leading them to their heavenly home. But not only a Father, a Friend, comforting them in their troubles and afflictions, listening to their difficulties, and giving them counsel and advice.

III. *For this God is our God for ever and ever.* He is not only our God now, but for ever. The owner of vast estates cannot say these are mine for ever and ever, the king cannot say of his crown, this is mine for ever and ever ; for they know they must soon pass into other hands. There is only one unique possession of which we can make this boast, and that is God with all His glorious perfections. He is mine for ever and ever, for even death cannot separate me from His love. *He will be our Guide even unto death.* That is, as long as we need a guide, through all the dangers of life until we die. But after that He will still be our God, when in His glorious kingdom we see Him face to face, and drink in the joys of the Beatific Vision for evermore.

GOD'S PROVIDENCE JUSTIFIED

"Be not thou afraid when one is made rich, when the glory of his house is increased: For when he dieth he shall carry nothing away: his glory shall not descend after him."—
PSALM xlix. 16, 17.

THIS Psalm is a vindication of God in view of the different fortunes of the righteous and wicked in this world. It points us not only to the vanity of riches, but to the end of those *who boast themselves in the multitude of their riches* (v. 6). The poem falls into three divisions.

I. The whole world is called upon to listen to the Psalmist, who claims to speak with wisdom and understanding (vv. 1-4). Who is the speaker? for his utterance is with evident authority. S. Basil says, None other than the Holy Ghost could have the right to address so august an audience as *all ye inhabitants of the world* (v. 1). S. Augustine regards the speaker as prophecy personified, and thus speaking to all people, and that not of one generation only, but to those who should come after as long as the world lasts. S. Bernard refers the words to Christ; for Who has a better right to call on each class, and on every rank? He, so highly exalted in the bosom of His Father; He, so lowly tabernacling in the womb of the Virgin; He, so rich as the Lord of the City whose streets are paved with gold; He, so poor that He had the wood of a manger for His cradle, the wood of the boat's stern for a pillow, and the wood of the Cross for His last bed.

II. In the second part we have a description of the boastful rich whose wealth fills them with arrogance, and inspires in them the desire to immortalize their names upon earth. In one of the Latin versions of the Psalter this Psalm is admirably described as "*Vox ecclesiæ super Lazaro et divite purpurato.*" For, indeed, Christ's parable of The Rich Man and Lazarus (S. Luke xvi. 19-31) is the inspired commentary on it. Riches will do many things in this world, but there is one thing it cannot do: it cannot prolong a man's life by one day or save him from the grave. This is the meaning of *None of them can by any means redeem*

his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him : For the redemption of their soul (life) is costly, and must be let alone for ever. The word translated "soul" here signifies "life," and not the immortal part of man. The only question discussed is the value of wealth in preserving life or saving a man from the grave, and for this its value is nothing. Wise men die, and rich and poor, the fool and the brutish together perish, and leave their wealth to others (cf. v. 10).

III. In the third part, the consolations of the righteous are shown to consist in just that which riches cannot secure. In their end *they* (the selfish and ungodly rich) *are appointed as a flock for Sheol ; death shall be their shepherd.* As the shepherd lives upon his flock, so death shall feed upon them. But for Christ's own flock the Good Shepherd died to give life to His sheep, and He shall lead them in the green pastures and beside the still waters here, and hereafter shall receive them into His kingdom—*Come ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world* (S. Matt. xxv. 34).

There is a contrast, running through this part, between riches, flaunted before the world, but lost at the moment of death, and the wealth of character, concealed from the world, developed by adversity, and finding its beatitude in that world into which character is the only thing we can carry with us—*Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints* (Ps. cxvi. 15). There is a contrast between "my" lands, called by "my" name of the worldling and the one possession of the righteous—"my" God. There is a further contrast between the failure of wealth to redeem man from the grave and the certainty that God will redeem the righteous who put their trust in Him (cf. vv. 7-9 ; and 15). *Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory* (Ps. lxxiii. 24).

THE CHALLENGE OF GOD

*“Offer unto God the sacrifice of thanksgiving; And pay thy vows unto the Most High; And call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.”—*PSALM I. 14, 15.

THE introduction of this Psalm is indeed magnificent! The Speaker is God, the audience an assembled world! It is God's challenge to man to meet Him in judgment, an anticipation of the great Day of Judgment at the end of time. We find a somewhat similar challenge in Amos (iv. 12)—*Prepare to meet Thy God, O Israel.* Then follows an exposition of that true service which God requires from man, and an exposition of the folly which makes religion to consist in a mere offering of sacrifice and gifts. After which comes a denunciation of a religion of formalism and hypocrisy, and a declaration that the true fulfilment of the Law is to be found in obedience and thanksgiving.

I. Heaven and earth: God's saints and the wicked are summoned to hear God speak, as He spake on Sinai, revealing and expounding His Law. And, first, the law of sacrifice. The value of sacrifice is to be looked for not in the costliness of that which is offered, nor in the multiplication of the gifts offered—*For the world is God's, and the fulness thereof* (cf. v. 12)—but in the spirit which prompts the offering; for in God's eyes the motive of the offering determines its worth. True sacrifice must be the expression of love, the outcome of a grateful heart striving to render to God the homage of thanksgiving and of obedient service—to give that which costs much, only because the giver loves much.

II. Two aspects of worship divide the world—formalism and spiritual worship. There are those, at all times the majority, who make religion to consist in the punctual observance of forms, ceremonies and precepts: as though these things, in themselves and apart from the devotion of the heart, could be pleasing to God. This was the essence of Pharisaism, and it drew from Christ the denunciation—*Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees,*

hypocrites ! for ye tithe mint and anise and cummin, and have left undone the weightier matters of the law, judgment, and mercy, and faith : but these ye ought to have done, and not to have left the other undone (S. Matt. xxiii. 23).

Into the lives of many Churchmen to-day the same spirit now enters : for many pride themselves upon their scrupulous observance of the letter of the Church's teachings—the seasons of fast and festival, the Sunday obligation and the Friday abstinence ; and even the customs of a correct ritual. They make religion to consist in these things (which are indeed good), but they allow themselves considerable laxity in the duties of their moral and spiritual life. The explanation of this is not difficult. Most men find it easier to *do* than to *be*, to offer sacrifices, which cost time and money, rather than to give their hearts to God, a gift which involves a change of life—the surrender of all that is displeasing to God, and the consecration to Him, in loving service, of the whole life.

III. *Whoso offereth the sacrifice of thanksgiving glorifieth Me ; And to Him that ordereth his conversation aright will I show the salvation of God* (v. 23). To offer sacrifice alone is insufficient ; but to offer it together with a thankful heart is to glorify God. And, if to this be added the consecration to His service of a holy life, God will show that man His salvation. So we find our Lord teaching ; for, when asked by the woman of Samaria a controversial question about the rival claims of Jerusalem and Samaria, He replied, *God is Spirit : and they that worship Him must worship in spirit and truth . . . for such doth the Father seek to be His worshippers* (S. John iv. 24, 23).

WRONG VIEWS OF GOD

"These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself; But I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes."—
PSALM l. 21.

THE last section of this Psalm (vv. 16-22) is addressed to the wicked; and is chiefly concerned with sins against the moral law. These are traced ultimately to wrong views about God—*Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself*. Why? Because when they did all these evil deeds (vv. 16-20), and God kept silence, the ungodly, since they were not immediately punished, thought that God condoned their sins. And this they think now.

I. In this world wrong thinking, if it lead to action, is punished with invariable severity. Nature is inexorable, and always exacts the penalty for breaking her laws. The man who thinks that fire does not burn, or that small-pox is not contagious, or that he can walk upon the water, finds, when he puts these erroneous opinions into practice, that the penalty for wrong thinking is serious, and is uniformly enforced. What ground then is there for supposing that God, Who created nature, regards with indifference the violation of the moral and spiritual laws which He has implanted in man's conscience, and revealed in His Holy Word? There are absolutely no grounds for supposing this. On the contrary, to the great proclamation of God's character—that He is *full of compassion and gracious, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy and truth*, there is added, that He *will by no means clear the guilty* (cf. Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7).

II. But of all the subjects of thought, wrong thoughts of God is that in which error is most disastrous in its effects; for they influence and determine our present life most harmfully, and, unless corrected, their evil consequences in the life to come may be irremediable and eternal—*Thou thoughtest that I (God) was altogether such an one as thyself*. Our views of God are largely coloured by our

proclivities, for we see God through the medium of our own character. As we are told in Psalm xviii. (vv. 25, 26) — *With the merciful Thou (God) wilt shew Thyself merciful : with the perfect man Thou wilt show Thyself perfect : with the pure Thou wilt shew Thyself pure ; and with the perverse Thou wilt show Thyself froward.* While this primarily means that God's dealings with a man depend largely upon his character, the converse is also true that upon a man's character depends his views of God. And yet God is immutable, always the same. What is the explanation ? *No man hath seen God at any time* (S. John i. 18). Our knowledge of God is always mediate, and the medium through which we behold God frequently distorts our vision. It is so with natural sight. We see ourselves in a mirror, and, if the mirror be imperfect, the image is distorted. We see things through a closed window, and if there be a flaw in the glass, it imparts an obliquity to the objects before us. At times the sun appears red, like a ball of fire; there is no change in the sun, but certain minute particles in the atmosphere produce the red effect. So we behold God through the atmosphere of character, which we have created, and our vision of Him is often distorted by the flaws in our own character.

III. *Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself.* There is a truth in this ; since man was made in the image of God ; and in the Incarnation we see that man is capable of being taken into God. In the Fall the *image of God* was not lost, but all supernatural grace and preternatural gifts. To realize our likeness to God ought to be helpful and inspiring. But to think of God as like ourselves in our ignoble qualities and sinful desires leads only to such wrong views of God as are reprov'd in this verse.

THE WINGS OF THE DOVE

“*And I said, Oh that I had wings like a dove ! Then would I fly away, and be at rest.*”—PSALM lv. 6.

THE first of the three sections of which this Psalm is composed (vv. 1-8 ; 9-15 ; 16-23) contains a very model of earnest prayer. There is a typical invocation, a most graphic statement of the troubles that are oppressing the suppliant, and a touching expression of his heart's desire. The invocation is more than a bare act of prayer, it consists of a threefold plea to be heard—*Give ear to my prayer, O God ; and hide not Thyself from my supplication. Attend unto me, and answer me.* Then follows a statement of the causes of his trouble, and of its effect upon him—pain, terror of death, fearfulness and trembling, and overwhelming horror. Lastly in words of most exquisite pathos, there is the expression of his desire to escape from a situation so full of peril, and to find REST. These words have been on the lips of many a wearied soul : let us consider them.

I. There are many causes of that world-weariness which at one time or another makes itself felt in every life. There is the weariness of the worn-out worldling, who has loved the world with all his heart, and has drunk deeply of all its pleasures, until he has become satiated with each in turn, but without satisfying his cravings. He is left with a diseased body, a restless mind, a deadened heart, a depraved character, and a guilty conscience, and longs for rest and peace. But *there is no peace, saith the Lord, unto the wicked* (Isa. xlviii. 22). There is the weariness of the men who have made money, or power, or popularity, the ruling passions of their lives, and have learned how little these can satisfy the immortal soul. None of these caused the heart-cry of the Psalmist. With him it was the wickedness which he saw all round him, and which pressed so heavily on a heart given to God. With such the desire to escape from the atmosphere of sin was legitimate.

II. To the Christian soul, wearied and oppressed by the sin of the world, the Psalmist's words have a meaning far

deeper than they had to him. He only used the figure of a timid dove, with no power to fight, fleeing away to its refuge in the woods. But, as S. Hilary reminds us, we have *the Dove*, the Holy Ghost, and upon His wings, spread in prayer, we can flee away and rest in God. *Return unto thy rest* (Heb. thy Noah), *O my soul* (Ps. cxvi. 7). Both passages carry us in thought to the story of Noah's dove, which finding *no rest for the sole of her foot, returned unto him to the ark, and he put forth his hand and took her, and brought her in unto him in the ark* (Gen. viii. 9). So we, when the floods of sin threaten us, can return unto our Noah, our true Rest, and the Pierced Hands will be put forth to receive us safely into the refuge of His Church.

III. We all have our trials, and for those who love God and therefore love His Church, there is a special source of trial now in the oppressions of the Church, and the practical revolt against the teachings of Christianity, especially with regard to the indissolubility of marriage, and the sanctity of family life. It is therefore more than ever a time to use the wings of the Dove to flee in earnest prayer to the throne of grace, there to plead the cause of Christ's suffering children, and to take refuge in the cleft of His pierced side until this tyranny be overpast, and we hear our Bridegroom's voice—*Rise up, My love, My fair one, and come away. O My dove, thou art in the clefts of the Rock.*

REST AND DUTY

“ *And I said, Oh that I had wings like a dove ! Then would I fly away, and be at rest.*”—PSALM lv. 6.

THERE is another point of view from which we may regard this passage—as a natural aspiration in time of grievous trouble and oppression ; but one which is not to be yielded to unless we are clear that in seeking rest we are not deserting the path of duty.

I. When our environment is altogether adverse, and threatens not only our peace of mind but even the progress of our spiritual life, we have to consider how it ought to be met. There are generally two ways open to us when faced with difficulty—the way of fight and the way of flight. On the one hand, there is the fact that we were put into this world to be tried. We are told that *through many tribulations we must enter into the Kingdom of God* ; and that *Blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when he hath been approved, he shall receive the crown of life* (Acts xiv. 22 ; S. James i. 12). At our baptism we were signed with the sign of the Cross “ that hereafter we shall not be ashamed . . . to fight under Christ’s banner.” Yet on the other hand, all spiritual writers agree in teaching that there are circumstances in which flight and not fight is not only justifiable but our duty. This is especially the case when we are assaulted by temptations against either faith or purity. Moreover, in all the difficulties of life, it is the part of prudence to decline a hopeless cause, and prudence is one of the cardinal virtues. Each case then must be decided separately. Let us now consider the chief determining factors of our choice.

II. We must not desert the post of duty on account of its difficulty. If God has called us to the task, He will give us grace to meet the obstacles in our path. To flee from these simply because of the struggle they demand is to abandon the work that God has given us to do. Besides, we must remember that change of environment by no means secures to us freedom from difficulty. Each environment has its own peculiar trials, and, whereas we are

assured of God's help in doing the work of His appointment, we cannot claim that help if we are seeking to evade a duty only because it involves suffering. Furthermore, we must realize that rest, the permanent enjoyment of repose from effort, does not belong to us in this world, but is the reward of those whose work is done, and whose victory is secured.

III. The trials of life are disciplinary : to seek to avoid them by flight is to allow our life to become a failure in its most essential purpose, which is the preparation of the soul for eternity. Life is the school in which we are being trained and developed to take our place in the everlasting life of the City of God of which, in baptism, we have been made citizens. We know something of the direful effects of wasted school-days, when through sloth tasks are neglected or only half done, and the discipline of steady work is evaded. The penalty is generally an untrained mind, an enervated will, and the formation of habits of idleness : these render us unfit either to fulfil the duties of life or to find any real enjoyment in its legitimate pleasures. In this world the consequences are generally unfitness for the position we are called to occupy. Besides this, there is the lifelong sense of failure, with its accompanying remorse—the consciousness that it is our own fault, that it might all have been so different. In the world to come the result of our refusal to accept the discipline of trial here will be the loss of all further opportunity, the loss of God, of the friendship of the saints, and of those we loved on earth, who are in Heaven. In a word, the exclusion for ever from the City of God, and condemnation to the abode of the lost with its companionship of lost souls and devils.

FEAR AND TRUST

"What time I am afraid, I will put my trust in Thee. In God I will praise His word : In God have I put my trust, I will not be afraid ; What can flesh do unto me ?"—PSALM lvi. 3, 4.

PSALMS lvi and lvii have been styled "twin Psalms" because they have so many similar characteristics. They begin with the same words, are nearly of the same length, and have each a refrain dividing them into two portions (cf. lvi. 4, 10 ; lvii. 5, 11). Both are written in circumstances of great distress, and the character of thought in them is very similar. Each begins with prayer for deliverance from oppression and calamity, and each ends with praise and thanksgiving. Two thoughts are prominent in each—fear of man and trust in God : the latter being set forth as the remedy for the former.

I. Fear is one of the most common passions of man. It arises from the recognition (and sometimes the exaggeration) of impending evil or harm, and is accompanied by a strong desire to escape it. Its effects are both physical and mental : such as trembling, impairment of speech, and inability to think clearly or act judiciously. Our refuge in fear is God—in the shadow of Thy wings will I take refuge (Ps. lvii. 1). Trust in God is the only effectual antidote. An act of faith and a state of fear seem contradictory, but they are not ; for it is quite possible for fear and faith to occupy the mind at the same moment. With great peril threatening us fear is natural, and it is a blessed fear if it drives us to God for help. Against the overwhelming power of our enemy we set the almighty power of God, and there ought to be no hesitation or doubt about the result. Hence an act of faith is the remedy for fear ; for it allays our alarm, and enables us to say with the Psalmist, *In God have I put my trust, I will not be afraid ; what can flesh do unto me ?* What can mere man do when God is my Protector ?

II. The action of faith upon fear is not always the same. In its most perfect operation it vanquishes the rising

fear ; so that, with the Psalmist, we can say, *In God have I put my trust, I will not be afraid*. But, frequently, fear remains and a lesser faith only enables us to cry to God for help. We have an example of this in S. Peter, whose weakness of faith caused him to sink in the waves, when he saw the wind ; though it still enabled him to cry effectively to his Master, Lord, save me. The cry was answered, for *immediately Jesus stretched forth His hand, and took hold of him*. But reproof followed, *O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt ?* (S. Matt. xiv. 30, 31).

III. *I will render thankofferings unto Thee. For Thou hast delivered my soul from death : Hast Thou not delivered my feet from falling ? That I may walk before God in the light of the living ?* (vv. 12, 13). The Psalmist fitly ends with a confession of the consequences of his act of faith, as manifested in his experiences of God's mercy. The peril which had made him fear was nothing less than the prospect of death at the hands of those who desired to swallow him up. From this fate, he gratefully acknowledges, he has been delivered only by the mercy of God, not by his own courage or prowess. But more than this ; for looking back he recognizes that in lesser dangers God has preserved his feet from falling in order not only that he may walk, but *walk before God* in the light of the living. Therefore he says, *I will render thank offerings unto Thee*. How many turn to God for succour in times of trouble or danger ! How few bring their thank-offerings to Him in loving acknowledgment of His gracious deliverance when that danger has passed !

JUDGMENT HUMAN AND DIVINE

"So that men shall say, Verily there is a reward for the righteous : Verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth."—
PSALM lviii. 11.

IN this Psalm we have a comparison and a contrast between man's judgments and those of God.

I. The Psalm opens with a challenge of human judgments—*Do ye judge uprightly, O ye sons of men?* That the answer is emphatically in the negative is shown by the verses that follow, as well as by the clause that precedes the question : *Do ye indeed in silence speak righteousness?* That is, *Are you silent when justice should be done?* Withholding or concealing your verdict through fear of the unpopularity of the truth, or through a desire to curry favour with workers of wickedness? So, when our Lord asked of the Pharisees, *What think ye of the Christ? whose son is he?* They gave the stock answer : *The son of David.* But to the further question : *How then doth David in the spirit call him Lord?* They kept silence, refusing to commit themselves by any answer. To refuse to do justice is a serious sin ; but there is a worse—the open prostitution of justice by those who begin by plotting wickedness in their hearts, and then give effect to their nefarious schemes by acts of violence and words of deceit (cf. vv. 2, 3).

II. The development of evil in those who have turned aside from the paths of righteousness is traced in the next section (vv. 2-5). Character is the resultant of many forces operating upon the will, and issuing in separate acts which gradually influence and form the character. The seed-plot of evil is generally the heart or mind. Our Lord says, *Out of the heart of man come forth evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, etc.* (S. Matt. xv. 19). It is in the heart that sin germinates, and unless it be at once crushed, it will put forth *first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear* (S. Mark iv. 28). So in this Psalm we read, first, of the working of wickedness in the heart, then of violence with the hand, then of lies proceeding from the mouth (cf.

vv. 2-5). No man becomes either good or bad all at once : there is a gradual growth ; little by little, the character is formed.

III. The Psalm closes with a reference to God's judgments. They are a great contrast to man's, in that they proceed from a mind that is absolutely holy, that their utterance is a manifestation of perfect truth, and that they are executed with impartial justice. With God there is no respect of persons ; rich and poor, high and low, meet with the same consideration. There are times when we see the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green tree in its native soil (cf. Ps. xxxvii. 35). But it is only for a little while—the time of mercy, the space for repentance, afforded by God's love ; and even during the period of their wickedness they are often subservient to God's purpose in providing for the righteous an opportunity for the exercise of faith in God, of patience towards man, and of that discipline in their own lives which tests and develops character.

The result of God's judgments, as manifested in this world, is seen in the workings of His Providence ; and it leads to a conviction in regard to two points. Men shall say, first, *Verily there is a reward for the righteous*. Evil-doing may seem for a time to flourish, but in the end it is punished, and virtue is rewarded ; then, *Verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth*. His judgments may seem to tarry, but they are sure ; and at last the inevitable sentence is passed and executed. But, if this be so in this world, how much more perfect will be its manifestation in the next—at the Day when, before the great White Throne, the dead, the great and the small, shall stand, and the books shall be opened, and the dead shall be judged out of the things written in the books, according to their works. Rev. xx. 11, 12.

THE BANNER OF GOD

"Thou hast given a banner to them that fear Thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth. That thy beloved may be delivered."—PSALM lx. 4, 5.

THE mournful character of the Psalm may be explained by a realization of the difficulties which David inherited from Saul, whose reign had been disturbed by internal strife, and had closed with the overwhelming disaster of Gilboa. The throne to which David succeeded was threatened both by factions at home, and by invasions from abroad ; and it was a long time before he overcame all his many enemies—Edomites, Moabites, Ammonites, Philistines, and Amalekites. In the opening verses (1-3) we have a description of the state of the land, which is followed by our text, in which David tells of the standard given by God to them that fear Him.

I. The purpose of a banner is manifold. It proclaims the authority under which men fight, and the cause which they defend. Given by God, the banner was His ensign, a rallying point for their hosts, a sign that they were fighting God's battle, and a guarantee that He would give them victory. Moreover, the banner is a symbol of union. The people had been fighting under many standards on account of their divisions, but the banner showed that they were now united under one leader. There is, perhaps, here an allusion to the brazen serpent—*And Moses made a serpent of brass, and set it upon the standard : and it came to pass that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he looked unto the serpent of brass, he lived* (Num. xxi. 9). The serpent, which was a symbol of the healing power of God, is, at least, an illustration of God's banner. History records many battles won against great odds through enthusiasm for the cause represented by the banner under which the men fought. We may observe that the banner was given to them that feared God. The standard is generally entrusted to the bravest and most fearless men, and certainly those who fear God most have less fear of men than any others.

II. There can be no doubt what is the Christian's banner. It is the Cross of Christ. In baptism we were signed with the sign of the Cross in token that we should not be ashamed to fight under His banner against sin, the world, and the devil ; and to continue Christ's faithful soldier unto our life's end. So on Passion Sunday the Church bids us sing :

The Royal Banners forward go,
The Cross shines forth in mystic glow.

It leads us to battle ; it is our life, our hope, our glory ; for we must cry with S. Paul : *Far be it for me to glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world hath been crucified unto me, and I unto the world* (Gal. vi. 14). The Cross is the banner Christ Himself gave to each of us, when He said : *If any man would come after Me let him deny himself, and take up his Cross, and follow Me* (S. Matt. xvi. 24).

III. *That it may be displayed because of the truth.* That is why the banner is given—that *Thy beloved may be delivered*. Yes ; but first, because of the truth. Christ's kingdom is essentially the kingdom of truth. As He witnessed before Pilate, *To this end have I been born, and to this end am I come into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth My voice* (S. John xviii. 37). In every age the conflict between truth and error is waged. Never more, perhaps, has this been evident than to-day, when a world, intoxicated with the sense of power, with the possession of wealth, and with the craving for luxury, prefers darkness to light, and error to truth, in order that it may gratify its lusts, and free itself from the restraints of the law of Christ. If we are among those who fear God, to us to-day God gives the banner of the Cross, that we may display it in the cause of truth.

THE ROCK OF AGES

"From the end of the earth will I call unto Thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: Lead me to the rock that is higher than I. For Thou hast been a refuge for me, a strong tower from the enemy."—PSALM lxi. 2, 3.

THE second verse limits the occasion when this Psalm was written to a time when David was shut out from the sanctuary, i.e., either during Saul's persecution or Absalom's rebellion. The reference to "the tabernacle" (v. 4) renders it almost certain that it is the latter; since during the former the Ark was at Kirjath-jearim (I Sam. vii. 2), and after the building of the temple there would be no further mention of "the tabernacle."

I. Troubles are of many kinds and of differing degrees of intensity. Of all David's adversities the rebellion of Absalom was the worst; for it not only menaced his throne, but almost broke his heart. He here described his heart as "overwhelmed." The word suggests such troubles as sweep over a man as the mighty billows of the ocean sweep over the sands, wave succeeding to wave. So the opening words of his supplication—three short, abrupt ejaculations—are like waves of prayer rhythmically corresponding to the billows that threatened to overwhelm him. Hear my cry, O God—Attend unto my prayer—from the end of the earth will I call unto Thee. He was terribly in earnest as men are when face to face with deadly peril.

II. What does David ask? To be lifted out of the billows, and placed upon the rock above him, which he could never reach by his own unaided efforts. "To the rock, lit. 'upon the rock'"; and the full construction might be rendered—"Thou wilt lead me, and place me upon the rock in a place of security." (The Hebrew for "rock" here is "sela," cliff, elevation.) The thought is evidently of a shipwrecked man, vainly clinging to the base of a cliff, and struggling in the waves to draw himself up to a position of safety. The peril was imminent, and the place of safety was within sight, but to reach it was for him

impossible ; therefore with all his might he cries to God for help, for he knows that with God all things are possible. He utters the cry with the assurance that God will hear, that help will come. His prayer is indeed the prayer of faith. He looks back upon the past, and says : *For Thou hast been a refuge for me, a strong tower from the enemy.* Notice well the "for." I put my trust in Thee now, for, because, Thou hast never failed me.

III. If these words meant so much on David's lips, how much more should they express on ours ! For with us the Rock is Christ, as most of the Fathers affirm in the light of S. Paul's words : *The Rock was Christ* (I Cor. x. 4). How many aspects of our Lord's work for us are associated with Him as the Rock ! Again and again is He spoken of as our fortress ; in Isaiah (xxxii. 2) as our shelter in a weary land ; as the hiding place of the soul (Cant. ii. 14) ; as the source of refreshment when parched with thirst (Num. xx. 11 ; S. John vii. 37). And S. Augustine, referring to Christ's words : Upon this Rock I will build my Church (S. Matt. xvi. 18), says : " Now therefore we perceive who it is who is crying from the end of the earth : She whom He hath willed to be builded upon a Rock crieth from the end of the earth." Whether therefore it be the Church or an individual member of the same, Christ is the Rock that is higher than I. For God hath given Him a Name that is above every name (cf. Phil. ii. 9). But He is not only the Rock but also the Tower, in which we may take refuge from our enemies. For *the Name of the Lord is a strong tower : The righteous runneth into it, and is safe* (Prov. xviii. 10).

THE SOUL WAITING UPON GOD

"My soul waiteth only upon God: from Him cometh my salvation. He only is my rock and my salvation: He is my high tower; I shall not be greatly moved."—PSALM lxii. 1, 2.

THE phraseology of Psalm xxxix and of this is so similar that though the subject is different, there can be little doubt that they were written by the same author. The Psalm consists of three strophes, each of four verses. The first two express the blessedness and security of trust in God when enemies assail (vv. 1-4; 5-8). The last contrasts with this the folly of reliance upon man (vv. 9-12). A peculiarity of the Psalm is the fivefold repetition of the word "only" (vv. 1, 2, 4, 5, 6), which is also found, thrice repeated, in Psalm xxxix (vv. 5, 6). We may also note that in this Psalm there is no word of petition.

I. The whole Psalm is a noble act of faith in God, expressed in eloquent language of triumphant assurance, and uttered in face of peril from unscrupulous enemies. It is noticeable that the expression of faith in the first strophe is repeated in the second with even greater confidence—e.g., *I shall not be greatly moved* (v. 2) and *I shall not be moved* (v. 6). He begins with the expectation of succour which would enable him to stand, though somewhat shaken by the attacks of his foes; but soon he is able to repeat his act of faith without this reservation, and to proclaim his assurance that his God *is able to save to the uttermost them that draw nigh to Him* (Heb. vii. 25). Therefore he asserts, *I shall not be moved*.

In v. 1, the word translated "waiteth" is, literally, "in silence." Only unto God my soul is in silence—i.e., is hushed into perfect resignation before God, trusting simply in His love, and leaving all to the disposal of His fatherly will.

II. In the second strophe, he addresses his enemies, and points out the vanity of human resources, whether of physical strength (v. 3), of unscrupulous deceit (v. 4), or of riches (v. 10). *How long will ye set upon a man, that ye may slay him, all of you* (v. 3). There is here a suggestion of

the cowardliness of a multitude banding themselves together against one man ; and it is followed by a prophecy of their end, when they shall have filled up the measure of their iniquity. They *ONLY* consult to thrust down. He *ONLY* waiteth upon God. They, *like a bowing wall, like a tottering fence*, will soon fall. Men of low degree are only vanity, and men of high degree are worse—a lie. That is they promise much to those who trust them, but their promises end in disappointment—*Put not your trust in Princes* (Ps. cxlvi. 3).

III. *God hath spoken once, Twice have I heard this; that power belongeth unto God: also unto Thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy* (vv. 11, 12). God hath spoken, hath revealed Himself; and the substance of that revelation is that to Him belong power and love or mercy ; for all nature bears witness to this, and creation manifests the unlimited power of God, Who hath brought it into being, and it declares, also, the truth that His tender mercies are over all His works (Ps. cxlv.). *Power belongeth unto God*. He is the source of all power. He is Omnipotent : not so much because He can do all things (since we cannot conceive of His doing evil), but because nothing can be done without Him : the very power which enables the ungodly to sin is God's power, entrusted to them for a brief space, and for the use of which they must give account. But mercy (which is a manifestation of love) is also His attribute, and is the complement and balance of His power.

THE THIRST OF THE SOUL FOR GOD

“ O God, Thou art my God ; early will I seek Thee : My soul thirsteth for Thee, my flesh longeth for Thee, in a dry and weary land, where no water is.”—PSALM lxxiii. 1.

IT is a question whether “ *early* ” or “ *earnestly* ” *will I seek Thee* is the better rendering. The LXX and Vulg. both give “ *early* ” ; and on this account the Psalm has been appointed for morning use from the earliest ages. Its daily recital is enjoined in the Apostolical Constitutions, and has never failed in East and West (at Lauds) since then. It bears a striking resemblance to Psalm lxi, and is evidently by the same author, David, and is to be referred to the same occasion, the rebellion of Absalom. This Psalm has been considered to be “ unquestionably one of the most beautiful and touching in the whole Psalter.” Like the previous Psalm, it contains no word of petition.

I. *O God, Thou art my God.* Used with a realization of their full meaning, these words are, perhaps, the most sublime that human lips can utter ; for they sum up in one brief clause the whole religion of a Christian—faith, adoration, and complete self-surrender. To confess that God is our God is to summarize our Creed, and to dedicate our life to its highest end in the service of God. More, it is to impose upon ourselves a rule of conduct which will enable us to overcome at once the temptations which may assail us ; for, if He be our God, His commandments must be our standard of action ; so that when tempted to break one of them we shall reply, *How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God ?* (Gen. xxxix. 9).

Early will I seek Thee. If God be our God, we shall begin each day with an act of re-dedication of ourselves and of our work to God ; and with a prayer that He will guide and bless us.

II. *My soul thirsteth for Thee, my flesh longeth for Thee, in a dry and weary land, where no water is.* Of all the appetites of man thirst is the most intense and the most predominating. Hunger with all its pangs may be endured ;

but thirst, if it be not sated, ends in delirium. Hence "thirst" is used to express the most intense desires of which our nature is capable. We speak of a man's thirst for love, for power, for money, etc. In this Psalm it is used of a greater passion than any of these, of man's thirst for God, a thirst implanted in him by God at his creation, when the soul of man was made for God, so that it can never find real satisfaction or true rest until it rests in Him. The addition, "my flesh longeth for Thee," is no mere redundancy, it expresses the desire of the whole man for God, the heart of flesh reaching out with its human affection towards Him Who has a personal love for each of His children.

In a dry and weary land, where no water is. To the soul thus reaching out after God the world is indeed a dry and weary land, unfertilized by the waters of grace; and the longer we dwell in it, and experience its utter failure to satisfy the thirst of our soul, the more keenly do we realize its barrenness.

III. *So have I looked upon Thee in the Sanctuary, to see Thy power and Thy glory.* Here David tells us where he found the chief satisfaction of his thirst for God. It was in God's Sanctuary. There, in the Presence of Jehovah, he looked for His power and glory. He looked through the veil of ceremonies to the Invisible One, and his heart was gladdened and his soul refreshed by communion and conscious fellowship with God. The two attributes which most impressed him were God's power and glory. We behold these in a measure in Nature, God's power as manifested in the storm, and God's glory as faintly reflected in the splendours of a magnificent sunset. But how much more when "in the Spirit" we contemplate the glories of His kingdom in eternity.

A HARVEST HYMN OF THANKSGIVING

"Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it, Thou greatly enrichest it ; the river of God is full of water : Thou providest them corn, for so preparest Thou the earth."—PSALM lxxv. 9.

AN abundant harvest, to give thanks for which the whole people assembled at Zion, was doubtless the occasion of the composition of this beautiful Psalm. With an agricultural and pastoral people like the Jews, the harvest was the principal event of the year, engrossing their thoughts and stimulating either their hopes or fears ; since their prosperity depended, almost entirely, upon it ; and a bad harvest meant much distress. Hence we find that their three principal festivals were all connected with the harvest. The Passover was associated with the beginning of the barley harvest, the Feast of Pentecost with the conclusion of the grain harvest, when the two wave-loaves of the finest wheaten flour were offered to God. And the Feast of Tabernacles or Ingathering, the greatest of all their festivals, held in the month Tishri (September-October), when the vintage and olive-harvest were just over, was the Harvest Thanksgiving for the combined produce of the whole year.

I. *Thou providest them corn.* Bread is the staff of life ; for though it may be possible for individuals to prolong life without it, yet for man as a race it is indispensable. Bread, more than any other food, contains all those various ingredients which are requisite for man's nourishment and well-being ; and is therefore supreme among the necessaries of life. Large numbers of our race do without animal food, but no nation subsists entirely without bread, made from corn of some kind. The failure of the corn-harvest in the markets of the world means famine in many countries, and starvation in many homes. It is very suggestive that the exigencies of the production of corn bring home to man many lessons, spiritual as well as economical. Bread came from God at first, it is man's most universal food ; for wherever man dwells it can be grown in some form or other.

II. Corn requires cultivation. It is an annual, and has to be renewed year by year. It depends upon the labour of man. Many gifts come to us irrespective of our own efforts, but it is not so with corn. It demands man's care, and without it would soon die out. In order that it may be preserved it has to be sown by man in land prepared by him. Ploughing the land, sowing the seed-corn, reaping it, threshing it; all require labour: and labour is one of the most useful disciplines of life. Corn, too, is one of the great bonds of union between men, and teaches the brotherhood of man. If there be famine in Canaan, there is corn in Egypt, and Egypt supplies the need of Canaan. Moreover, each year's supply is but a measured quantity, not greatly in excess of the amount needed for food. The power of heaven must work with us, the rain and sunshine, to assure us a plenteous harvest.

III. Corn, both symbolically and actually, is associated with the highest spiritual blessings. Our Lord uses it as a symbol of the Word of God (S. Matt. iv. 4), and of the mystery of Redemption (S. John xii. 24); while S. Paul employs it to illustrate the glories of the Resurrection (1 Cor. xv. 35-38). It is, however, in the Sacrament of the Altar that it attains its highest religious significance; for Christ appointed wheaten bread to be the means whereby He conveys to us the supreme gift of His Body and Blood to be the food and sustenance of our spiritual nature, as bread is of our physical nature. For Christ said: *I am the Bread of Life . . . If any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: yea, and the bread which I will give is My flesh, for the life of the world. . . . Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, ye have not life in yourselves. He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood hath eternal life* (S. John vi. 35, 51, 52, 54).

COME AND SEE, COME AND HEAR

"Come, and see the works of God ; He is terrible in His doing toward the children of men. . . . Come, and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what He hath done for my soul."

—PSALM lxvi. 5, 16.

THIS is a Psalm of praise for God's works both of judgment and mercy in His dealings with the children of men. Two verses stand out conspicuously, each containing an invitation : the former to come and see God's works of judgment, the latter to come and hear His works of grace.

I. Come, and see the works of God (v. 5). The first invitation is to study the record of God's dealings with impenitent sinners who harden their hearts against God's commandments, even though enforced by wonderful and terrible manifestations of His power. The example set before us is the destruction of the Egyptians in the Red Sea, after Pharaoh's repeated and defiant rejection of God's demand that he should do justice to the suffering Israelites. In no case are God's dealings with a sinner marked by greater patience, or more full opportunities of penitence than in that of Pharaoh, who, in spite of the manifestations of the truth of the message brought by Moses and of the power of God to enforce it, deliberately hardened his heart, and rejected the call of God.

Through the greatness of Thy power shall Thine enemies submit themselves unto Thee (v. 3). The last four words are better rendered "yield Thee feigned obedience" (Heb. lie). It evidently refers to the lying promises of Pharaoh that he would let the Israelites go. How like many a sinner now, who promises repentance and amendment under the impulse of fear, but, when the threatening trouble is removed, goes back to his sin.

II. *Come, and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what He hath done for my soul* (v. 16). The great judgments of God, like the destruction of Pharaoh's hosts, are manifest to everyone on the pages of history, but God's works of grace are for the most part hidden, being revealed only to those who experience God's mercy in

dealing with them. It is therefore for such to bear grateful witness to what God has done for their souls. There is a natural tendency to reticence about our spiritual experiences, and it is well that it should be so ; yet there are occasions when it behoves us, for God's glory, and to draw others to Him, to declare the great things God has done for us, in freeing us from the bondage of besetting sins, in strengthening us to bear overwhelming afflictions, and in making known in our heart the light of the truth. Sometimes it becomes a duty to tell these things, not to the world at large, but to them *that fear God*, for only such will hear to good purpose; to others who care not for such things it would be casting our pearls before swine, it would do them no good, and might do us much harm.

III. Devout persons have often found great encouragement and help from reading the lives of the saints. Surely this is because the saints show us what God has done for other souls. They were men and women, like ourselves, whose lives were full of trial and temptation, and we learn from their biographies just how they met their difficulties. They carried their troubles to God, and, like S. Paul, they found that His grace was sufficient for them. We may often learn from their spiritual experiences lessons of great value in meeting the various obstacles which lie in our path. They teach us, too, the joy of fellowship with God, and the wonderful power of His grace in sanctifying even the most unpromising characters. They seem to say to us, in the words of the Psalmist, *Come, and see what God hath done for my soul.*

THE SONG OF THE ARK

“ Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered ; let them also that hate Him flee before Him. As smoke is driven away, so drive them away : as wax melteth before the fire, so let the wicked perish at the presence of God.”—PSALM lxxviii. 1, 2.

THE subject of this grand hymn is the entry of God into His Sanctuary—the historical event of the Ark entering Zion, which prefigures Christ’s Ascension into heaven. The majority of commentators refer the composition of this Psalm to David’s removal of the Ark from the house of Obed-edom (2 Sam. vi.). Some, on account of its martial character, associate with this David’s victory over the Syrians and Edomites (2 Sam. viii.).

I. *Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered.* In these opening words we have the key-note to the Psalm ; since we recognize in them the prayer of Moses, when the Ark set forward during the journeyings through the wilderness (Num. x. 35). We know too that, during the period of the Judges, and up to the time of David, it was still the practice, at least on special occasions, for the Ark to accompany the Army in its campaigns (cf. Josh. iii. 7 ; vi. 6 ; 1 Sam. iv. 3 ; 2 Sam. xi. 11 ; xv. 24).

The Psalm then is the Song of the Ark on its removal to its resting-place on Zion, and commemorates especially its history in the journeyings of the Israelites on their way to Canaan—the story of God’s deliverances from enemies, and of His goodness towards them. Hence it has become the war-song of the Church of Christ on its march through the wilderness of this world to the promised land—Heaven ; and it has been used as the prayer of the Church in times of coldness and backsliding, and of worldly persecution.

II. The Ark as a type of Christ. It contained three things—the Tables of the Law, the pot of Manna, and Aaron’s rod that budded. The Ark had for one of its titles—“ The Ark of the Testimony,” because the tables of the Law (which are a testimony to God’s character

and will) were contained in it (cf. Exod. xxv. 16, 21, 22). But what the Ark set forth incompletely, our Lord Jesus Christ revealed perfectly : for He was *the effulgence of His (God's) glory, and the very image of His substance* ; so that He could say to S. Philip, *He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father. For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily* (Heb. i. 3 ; S. John xiv. 9 ; Col. ii. 9).

The pot of Manna commemorated the heavenly food given to the Israelites in the wilderness, of which our Lord said, *I am the Bread of Life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness. . . . I am the living bread that came down from heaven* (cf. S. John vi. 48-51).

The Ark went before Israel in all their goings. When it moved, Israel moved ; when it rested, Israel rested. It was always their Leader and Guide. So is it with Christ, as Isaiah prophesied (lv. 4), *Behold, I have given Him for a witness to the peoples, a Leader and Commander to the peoples*. When the Israelites crossed the Jordan, the Ark preceded them—*Behold, the Ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth passeth over before you into Jordan* (Josh. iii. 11). In all our troubles, difficulties, and sorrows, this is our comfort and strength, that our leader Christ has passed through each trial before us, and we are called to follow Him, if we would know the fellowship of His sufferings, and the power of His resurrection (Phil. iii. 1).

III. Above all, we must remember that the Ark finally rested in the Sanctuary, towards which the thoughts, and hopes, and prayers, of God's people were henceforth directed ; and into which the High Priest once a year entered to make for them atonement and intercession. So it tells us that our High Priest, after having made atonement for us "without the camp" on Calvary, now ever liveth to make intercession for us (Heb. xiii. 13 ; vii. 25). And we pray that we may "in heart and mind thither ascend, and with Him continually dwell.

SHOWERS OF BLESSING

"Thou, O God, didst send a plentiful rain, Thou didst confirm Thine inheritance, when it was weary."—PSALM lxxviii. 9.

THE Ark went before Israel as their Guide and Leader through the wilderness, but besides guidance they needed food and sustenance, both physical and spiritual; and this God supplied in a wonderful way. The Israelites were a pastoral people, and, we know, took with them their flocks and herds. The feeding of so great a multitude, and of so many cattle, was an immense undertaking, quite impossible without the direct interposition of God. This was manifested both in His ordinary Providence and in the miraculous supply of water on two occasions from the rock, besides the plentiful showers referred to in the text.

I. The natural supply of water. This is a gift of God, though rain is the result of natural laws. Those laws, however, are the expression of God's will, and are subservient to the accomplishment of His purposes. The recognition of this is implied by the appointment in our Prayer Book of special prayers for rain in time of drought, and for fine weather when the ripening crops are threatened by a prolonged wet season. But this natural provision was supplemented by miraculous stores of manna and flocks of quail.

II. By most ancient commentators this passage is taken as referring to the manna and quails which, so to speak, were rained down so plentifully upon the Israelites in the wilderness; and they apply it figuratively, to the preaching of the word of God (as S. Gregory the Great), which descending upon the minds and souls of men, like showers upon the thirsty earth, refreshes and fertilizes them, enabling each to bring forth the fruits of good works and of Christian virtues. Others, with Ayguan; Dionysius the Carthusian, Zigadenus, etc., take it of the rain of God's grace, falling abundantly upon His Church and upon the individual soul, which without it are weak and helpless, but by it are strengthened and perfected in the

fulfilment of God's purposes for them. With regard to the literal reference to the manna and the quails, both were instances of God's providential provision for the Israelites in the wilderness. The former was the miraculous gift of a form of food, specially adapted to the conditions of their journeyings : it was nutritious and easily prepared, but lacking in variety and in the delicious flavour of the fruits to which they had been accustomed in Egypt. Hence they soon began to murmur, and when, a year later, they reached Taberah (Numb. xi.) their discontent became so wide-spread that God, listening to their discontent, gave them a second supply of quails in enormous quantity, but punished their greediness with a very great plague.

III. S. Paul claims these miraculous interpositions as figures of the work of Christ, saying, *the Rock was Christ* (1 Cor. x. 4). We in baptism passed through the Red Sea of the Precious Blood, when our sins were blotted out, and we entered upon our new life in Christ, and came under the beneficent guidance of the Holy Ghost, of Whom the shadow-cloud was a type. Now, throughout our journeyings heavenwards, Christ in the Eucharist gives us the Corn of the mighty, His most holy Body, the Wine of the angels, His most precious blood, Which were prefigured by the manna and the water from the Rock. Christ is the Bread of life and the Water of life ; for He said, *He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood hath eternal life* (S. John vi. 48, 54). *If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink* (S. John vii. 37).

We know that with all these privileges the Israelites failed again and again in their obedience to God, and that with the exception of Joshua and Caleb they all died in the wilderness. Let us then take to heart the inspired warning, *Let us fear therefore, lest haply, a promise being left of entering into His rest, any one of you should seem to have come short of it* (Heb. iv. 1).

THE SACRIFICE OF PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING

"I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify Him with thanksgiving. And it shall please the Lord better than an ox, or a bullock that hath horns and hoofs."
—PSALM lxix. 30, 31.

IN this passage, as in Psalm li. 17, David teaches us the character of a true sacrifice, that it is to be found not so much in the material object which is offered as in the spirit of the offerer. We have therefore here a most valuable witness to the spiritual side of all true religion which, while expressed in rites and ceremonies instituted by the authority of God, must be accompanied by the offering of the devotion of the heart, if it is to be pleasing and acceptable to God.

I. The necessity of symbols. The Old Covenant with its rites and sacrifices was a religion of symbols, instituted by God for the education of His chosen people. We are taught that the Law had "a shadow of the good things to come" (Heb. x. 1). These rites were therefore types of the work of Christ and of the sacraments He was to ordain in His Church; but differed from the sacraments in that, while the types pointed to future blessings, the sacraments were not only outward and visible signs of grace but the means whereby that grace was conveyed. Furthermore, our Lord instituted the sacraments to supply the needs of His Church, thus teaching us that, since man is body and spirit, his worship must be twofold, that of body and spirit. But the worship of the body, if it is to be acceptable to God, must be the outcome and expression of the spirit; for external religion (or symbol), which is not the fruit of interior devotion, is valueless. If there be no life within, elaborate and correct ritual, though instituted by Divine authority, is precisely the hypocrisy so unsparingly condemned by our Lord in the Pharisees (S. Matt. xxiii. 25-36).

II. David was careful to offer the sacrifices required by the Law (2 Sam. vi. 13; xxiv. 25); but here, as in Psalm li. 17, he points out that he offers with these sacrifices

that of praise and thanksgiving, which is more pleasing to God than animal sacrifice, though appointed by God. The clause, "a bullock that hath horns and hoofs," indicates that it fulfilled the requirements of the Law (Gen. xv. 9 ; Lev. xi. 3) : the horns showing that it was not under three years old, the hoofs that it belonged to the class of clean animals. David realized that the sacrifice in which God delighted was the sacrifice of *a troubled spirit, a broken and contrite heart*. There he is thinking of the sin-offering; but thank-offerings were also appointed, and he has these in mind when he says, *I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify Him with thanksgiving. And it shall please the Lord better than an ox.*

III. Ayguan takes this of the Eucharistic sacrifice, instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ. This is at once our sin-offering, our Peace-offering, and our Thank-offering ; for therein we plead Christ's precious death for the remission of our sins ; we have communion with God, with the whole company of heaven, and with all the Church militant on earth ; and as our thank-offering we offer and present ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice. It is then that we pour out the treasures of our devotion, the gold of our love, the frankincense of our prayer and the myrrh of our penitence. It is then that we receive God's richest gift, in the Body and Blood of His dear Son to be our food and sustenance. It is then that we depart with the fullest blessing—the peace of God which passeth all understanding, to keep our hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord : and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, to be amongst us and to remain with us for ever.

MAKE HASTE, GOD

"Make haste, O God, to deliver me; make haste to help me, O Lord."—PSALM lxx. 1.

OF all the petitions in the O.T., and, with the exception of the Lord's Prayer, in the whole Bible, this perhaps has been that most often uttered. For, as the Versicle and Response, "O God, make speed to save me. O Lord, make haste to help me," it is prefixed to the offices of all the Canonical Hours, is retained in our Matins and Evensong, and is therefore recited many times every day. Its selection is most appropriate, since it compresses into one short verse an invocation of God against peril, an expression of the vigilance of constant anxiety and fear, of trust that God will hear, and that we have a safeguard ever standing by. Its position at the opening of each office makes it a fitting prayer for the help of God to enable us to withstand the many temptations of the enemy who assails most assiduously when we are engaged in Divine Service, striving by the suggestion of wandering thoughts to destroy the efficacy of our prayers.

The whole Psalm, which is but a repetition of the last five verses of Psalm xl, has been taken (in a threefold application) of Christ in His Passion, of the Church in peril from false brethren and open enemies, and of individual penitents crying to God for His aid.

I. Of Christ in His Passion. The opening words are spoken in the Person of Christ. *I am poor and needy, make haste unto me, O God* (v. 5). We have here our Lord in His sufferings. He Who had been rich, for our sake became poor, that we through His poverty might be made rich. The word translated "poor" is often elsewhere rendered "afflicted." *He was despised, and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. . . . Yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted* (Isa. liii. 3, 4).

O Lord, make no tarrying (v. 5). His prayer for Himself, like His prayer for His friends and foes, was answered. Soon His Spirit was in Paradise, and the penitent thief, the first-fruits of the Cross, was with Him. In three days

He had risen again from the dead, and forty days later He ascended into Heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of the Father.

II. Of the Church in her affliction. How often since David's time has the Church of God, both under the Old and New Covenants, been oppressed ; and where better than in this Psalm has she found suitable words to impetrate the help of God, His speedy succour ?

III. But it is in its individual application that the Psalm comes home most closely to us ; for it supplies us with weapons against the assaults of our spiritual foes—ejaculations, precatory darts, cries for aid, most helpful and effective in times of great temptation.

The watchword of this Psalm is "Make Haste." With it the prayer opens, thrice it is repeated, and with a paraphrase of it the prayer closes—*O Lord, make no tarrying* (v. 5). The writer must have been in no ordinary trouble when he uttered these words. His enemies were seeking after his soul (*nephesh*, life), he needed deliverance from their hands, immediate help lest they should prevail against him. So pressing was his need that he cries to God to make haste. The grounds of his plea are that he is poor and needy, that he realizes this, and is not of those who say, *I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing* (Rev. iii. 17). He knows that he is poor, and has no helper on earth ; therefore he prays that God may be his Helper and Deliverer. His distress is so urgent that he cries again, *Make haste unto me, O God : O Lord, make no tarrying*. What an example to us in grievous trouble ! We must not be content with the mere telling of our needs to God, but must accompany our prayer with urgent cries for speedy succour.

AN OLD MAN'S PRAYER

"Cast me not off in the time of old age ; forsake me not when my strength faileth. . . . O God, Thou hast taught me from my youth ; and hitherto have I declared Thy wondrous works. Yea, even when I am old and grayheaded, O God forsake me not ; until I have declared Thy strength unto the next generation, Thy might to every one that is to come."—PSALM lxxi. 9, 17, 18.

EVIDENTLY this Psalm was written by one past the meridian of life, and verging upon old age. It is drawn largely from other Psalms (xxii, xxxi, xxxv, xl.), some of which were probably written later than David's time. It has no title in the Hebrew, but in the LXX the inscription is, "Of David, of the sons of Jonadab, and of those who were first led away captive." This is composite and self-contradictory. According to tradition it is associated with the Rechabites and the earlier exiles. This fits in well with Jeremiah, who is specially interested in the Rechabites (cf. Jer. xxxv), and the style and general character of the poetry agree with this authorship.

I. *In Thee, O Lord, do I put my trust* (v. 1). There is an exquisite pathos in these words on the lips of an old man, as expressive of that perfect trust in God which is the secret of all true happiness. His is a confidence which is the outcome of the experience of a long life, that God is the Strength of all them that put their trust in Him. And yet with all this trust in God there is a distrust of self—*Cast me not off in the time of old age ; forsake me not when my strength faileth*. But this too is the outcome of experience, the experience of his own weakness and proneness to evil. We find the same thought in S. Paul's words, *lest by any means, after that I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected* (1 Cor. ix. 27). Experience is a great teacher, both of the fidelity of God and of the untrustworthiness of human feelings. This twofold experience issues in a heartfelt prayer to God, *Cast me not off . . . Forsake me not*. It is twice repeated, and must be understood in the light of the act of faith with which he began the Psalm, *In Thee, O Lord, do I put my trust* (v. 1), not as implying any doubt

of the truth of God's promise, *I will in no wise fail Thee, neither will I in any wise forsake thee* (Josh. i. 5 ; Heb. xiii. 5), but only doubt of his own steadfast perseverance.

II. *For Thou art my hope, O Lord God, Thou art my trust from my youth* (v. 5). As S. Paul writes, God our Saviour and Christ Jesus our Hope (1 Tim. i. 1). For we can add to the Psalmist's experience our Lord's gracious invitation and promise, *Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest—Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out* (S. Matt. xi. 28 ; S. John vi. 37). He that has trusted God in his youth will indeed be able to trust Him in his old age ; for the memory of many deliverances from past dangers will give confidence of similar protection in the few years that yet remain before God calls him to the rest and reward of heaven.

III. There is one further petition which the old man makes, *Forsake me not until I have declared Thy strength unto the next generation*. He asks a few more years of life, not that he may spend it in the accomplishment of some work on which his heart is set, and which may be his memorial after he has left this world ; but that he may declare God's strength unto the next generation, and his might to every one that is to come. In a word, that he may finish God's work entrusted to him, that he may use the brief time left him in bearing witness to the wonders of grace by which his God had enabled him to overcome in the day of struggle, and to the unfailing goodness and mercy which had brought him safe to the goal of life.

A KINGDOM OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

"Give the King Thy judgments, O God, and Thy righteousness unto the King's son. He shall judge Thy people with righteousness, and Thy poor with judgment. The mountains shall bring peace to the people, and the hills, in righteousness."
—PSALM lxxii. 1-3.

THIS (like Pss. xx, xxi, and xlv) is a Royal Psalm. The title ascribes it to Solomon, and internal evidence supports his claim. For there are marks of his style, as seen in Proverbs, while the allusions to Sheba and Tarshish connect it peculiarly with Solomon on account of the visit of the Queen of Sheba, and his possession of a "navy of Tarshish" (cf. 1 Kings x. 1-10 and v. 22). The hopes and aspirations here so grandly expressed are in accordance with the spirit in which Solomon began his reign (cf. 1 Kings iii.) and, as they found their fulfilment in One greater than Solomon, they are little less than prophecies. The subject of the Psalm is a description of an ideal kingdom, which is rendered glorious by the righteousness of the King and of his government, and therefore by the prosperity and happiness of the people.

I. *Give the King Thy judgments, O God, and Thy righteousness unto the King's son.* Was not this, in effect, the prayer of Solomon on ascending his throne (cf. 1 Kings iii. 6-9); and his first recorded act was one of conspicuous justice towards a woman who was of the poorest and lowest class among his people (1 Kings iii. 16-28). And yet how soon and how sadly Solomon declined from his first ideals. For his own aggrandizement he practically enslaved the people whom he set out to rule so well; since almost immediately we find him introducing enforced labour on a large scale (cf. 1 Kings v. 13-16). And when he died, at a comparatively early age, the kingdom was split in two by a revolt caused by the tyranny of his administration.

II. This Psalm, however, has always been taken of Christ and His kingdom, wherein is fulfilled that adminis-

tration of righteousness in which Solomon so conspicuously failed.

i. We have in it, first, the absolute righteousness of the King, in Whom, on the testimony of His judge and of His executioner, no fault was found (S. Luke, xxiii. 4, 14, 47).

ii. In promulgating the laws of His kingdom in the Beatitudes, the central place was given by our Lord to righteousness—*Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness : for they shall be filled* (S. Matt. v. 6). And the whole of Christ's ethical teaching was based upon absolute righteousness.

iii. The state and condition of this kingdom was wonderfully foretold by Isaiah, as one of perfect peace and happiness (Isa. xi. 4-9). This has never been fully realized on earth on account of the lukewarmness and inconsistency of professing Christians. But in the highest sense, it shall be attained in Christ's kingdom in Heaven.

III. We must remember that the righteousness of a kingdom is the outcome of the righteousness of the individual citizens of which it is composed. Of His kingdom, we are told, that *Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself up for it . . . that He might present the Church to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing ; but that it should be holy and without blemish* (Ephes. v. 25, 27). We, as members of that Church, must realize our great responsibility to set before the world that righteousness which Christ, both by precept and example, has put before us. While lamenting the low standard of Christianity and the inconsistencies of the Church in our own day, we must ask ourselves what we are doing, what sacrifices we are making, to show forth in our lives a truer example of the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ.

THE PROBLEM OF GOD'S PROVIDENCE

"Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever."—PSALM lxxiii. 25, 26.

THE subject of this most instructive Psalm is one that has occupied and perplexed men's minds in every age—the problem of God's moral government of the world, the explanation of the seeming injustice that the wicked should often be so prosperous and the righteous so afflicted.

I. We find in the O.T. three attempts to answer these difficulties—in the thirty-seventh Psalm, in the Book of Job, and in this Psalm. All alike recognize the perplexing character of the question, but each offers a different treatment and solution of it. In the thirty-seventh Psalm the conclusion reached is to trust God, to wait, resting in the confidence that in the end goodness will triumph and the seeming wrong will be set right in this world. In the Book of Job the subject is threshed out with great thoroughness, and the various solutions offered by Job's friends are shown to be fallacious. But no positive answer is given to the problem, which is left as an insoluble mystery. *I go forward, He is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive Him* (Job xxiii. 8). And, at the end of the Book, when Jehovah appears, it is to expose the folly of those who think they can fathom the counsels of the Most High. Job proposes humiliation and faith as the only way of meeting the problem. In the present Psalm a different conclusion is reached, one not a little similar to that of Psalm xxxvii., but the writer leaves us on much higher ground. He shows that the reward of the righteous is not to be sought in earthly honours or happiness. God is their portion. He is the strength and joy of their hearts even now, and He will be their great reward when they are taken to the glories of His heavenly kingdom.

II. The Psalm consists of two parts. In the former we have the story of the doubts which had assailed the writer, and of the temptations to which he had nearly

fallen a victim (vv. 1-14). In the latter the Psalmist confesses the sinfulness of these doubts, and sets forth the means by which he had been able to meet them, and to overcome them (vv. 15-28).

III. We may note that the doubts and difficulties of the first part of the Psalm (1-14) are overwhelming until the writer takes them with him *into the Sanctuary of God*; there they vanish (v. 17). For a consideration, in the Presence of God, of the latter end of the ungodly at once answers his perplexities. Everything is to be judged by its *end*, not by the things which happen by the way. And the end of the ungodly is the outer darkness of eternal separation from God. Similarly, the lot of the righteous is to be judged by their end. Sorrow may endure for the night, but joy cometh in the morning. The discipline of sorrow may endure through the night of this world; for through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God (Acts xiv. 22), but in that kingdom the glory of the resurrection morning will bring a joy so surpassing all present conception, that our afflictions, which were but for the moment of this life, will appear light in comparison with the eternal weight of glory to which they have brought us (cf. 2 Cor. iv. 17). And above all, we must remember that, even here, the Psalmist had learned to say, *Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee . . . God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever* (vv. 25, 26). Life looked at from the point of view of the present only is inexplicable; but regarded from that of eternity all difficulties vanish. For God is our portion now. And God will be our reward hereafter.

WINTER AND SUMMER

"*Thou hast made summer and winter.*"—PSALM lxxiv. 17.

THIS Psalm and the seventy-ninth both refer to the same catastrophe, and were probably written by the same author. Both deplore the extreme misery of the nation, the occupation of Jerusalem by a foreign army and the profanation of the Sanctuary. The seventy-fourth dwells chiefly on the destruction of the Temple, the seventy-ninth on the terrible slaughter of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. There are only two periods of Jewish history to which this could reasonably refer—the invasion of Nebuchadnezzar and the oppression of Antiochus Epiphanes. The complaint that there is no more any prophet ; neither is there among us any that knoweth how long (v. 9) is inconsistent with the fact that in Nebuchadnezzar's time there were the two great prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and that the former distinctly prophesied that the duration of the captivity would be seventy years (Jer. xxv. 11 ; xxix. 10). Moreover, the profanation of the Sanctuary and the erection there of ensigns (v. 4), the military standards or religious emblems of the heathen, accord very well with the description in 1 Maccabees i. 20-64.

I. After setting forth their dire calamities (vv. 1-11), the Psalmist enumerates God's mercies of old, among them His gift of fruitful seasons—*Thou hast made summer and winter*. From this he draws a lesson of encouragement, and a plea for help in their present need. The four seasons of the year have been called the four Evangelists of nature, who bring to the world God's annual message of love. Winter with its sternness first tells of the severity of God, Who *will by no means clear the guilty* (Exod. xxxiv. 7), though He is ever ready to pardon and take to His heart the penitent. Spring brings then the great message of hope, the supreme virtue of youth, and lasting on through life. It ever encourages man to effort ; for hope is the spring of human action, the stimulus to success. Summer with its warmth and sunshine speaks of God's mercy and love, filling our lives with brightness. Autumn, the in-

gathering of the fruits of the year, calls us to give thanks to Him from Whom cometh every good gift and every perfect gift. But if nature has her seasons, so has grace. Here we must confine ourselves to the two mentioned in the text—the summer and winter of the soul's life.

II. The summer of the soul. Who does not know it? When we bask in the sunshine of God's Presence and listen to the voices of nature, telling us of His wisdom and love. But if the summer is a time of great felicity, it is also a season of much temptation—to rest in the enjoyment of God's gifts; to become enervated by a life of spiritual ease; and worse, to yield to the seductions of passion, which makes its most unexpected assault when we are luxuriating in spiritual delights.

III. The winter of the soul. We need bracing, the discipline of spiritual effort, the bleak, but invigorating experience of being left to ourselves to put into practice the spiritual teachings of the seasons of fervour and ecstasy through which we have passed. And this need is supplied by the withdrawal of the sunshine and warmth of sensible devotion and the endurance, in its place, of a coldness and aridity in prayer, of a sense of desertion which is to us a new experience. All spiritual exercises become irksome, we look up to heaven, but its skies seem leaden. In our distress we cry to God, but we hear no reply. It is the testing of the soul. Blessed are those who then find their strength to endure by making their own David's words—*My soul trusteth in Thee, and under the shadow of Thy wings shall be my refuge till this tyranny be overpast* (Ps. lvii. 1). It is under the shadow of the Cross that we must take refuge during the winter of the soul, entering into the three hours' darkness there, and waiting in perfect trust till it be overpast, and the glorious light of Easter Day fill our hearts once more with life and warmth and love.

THE CUP OF MAN'S LIFE

"For in the hand of the Lord there is a cup, and the wine foameth; It is full of mixture, and He poureth out of the same: Surely the dregs thereof, all the wicked of the earth shall wring them out and drink them."—PSALM lxxv. 8.

THE term "cup" is frequently used in H.S. for a man's appointed lot in life, with its good and evil, its joys and sorrows. Sometimes it refers to life as a whole, more often to a particular occasion in life. The following are examples of each. *Thou hast anointed my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life*, etc. (Ps. xxiii. 5, 6). *Father, if Thou be willing, remove this cup from Me* (S. Luke xxii. 42). In our text it signifies the cup of God's judgment which all must drink, and contains a striking warning concerning the lot of the wicked.

I. *It is full of mixture.* In ancient times, wine was generally mixed with other ingredients to render it stronger or weaker, and spices were added to make it richer in flavour or more tonic in its effect. Thus we are told of wine mingled with myrrh, offered to those about to be crucified in order to deaden the senses to the fearful pain. The use of the word "merum" in Latin for "unmixed wine" points to the frequency with which wine was mingled with other things. So man's lot in life is generally a mixed one. In it there is much that is pleasant, but some things which afflict, some which humble us. These, however, are intended to have a tonic power, that we may be strengthened and invigorated by the bitter flavour of the cup God gives us to drink. There are dregs in the cup of a human lot, but only the wicked are compelled to drink them. The good, though tasting not unwillingly of the bitterness of disappointment, suffering, and sorrow, allowed them by God for their discipline, will refuse the dregs of evil, the indulgence in sin, which is not God's will for anyone; though, for our testing, Satan is allowed to tempt us. The dregs, however, in this passage, do not mean temptation to evil, but rather the fruits of sins which the wicked have

wilfully committed. These they are compelled to drain to the last drop, as S. Paul writes, *Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap* (Gal. vi. 7).

II. The cup in the hand of the Lord, by Him appointed for each, becomes to each, to a great extent, what he makes it by the right use, or by the abuse, of his gifts, opportunities, and afflictions. The figure used—a cup of wine—is singularly suggestive of this, since wine that maketh glad the heart of man, like oil and bread, is God's good gift, and our Lord chose, in His first miracle, to change water into wine to make glad the guests at the marriage at Cana. Nevertheless, how many find in wine an occasion of sin, not only the sin of drunkenness, but the greater sins of debauchery of all kinds, quarrelling, brawling, and violence leading to murder. We have little control over the main elements of our life—our birth, our endowments, our opportunities ; but the fact that they are assigned to us not by chance, but by God's Providence, assures us that, if we use them rightly, they must be for our good.

III. How immensely solemn is the thought that we are responsible for what we make of our cup, whether in the end we take from God's hand *the cup of salvation* or *the cup of the wrath of God* (Ps. cxvi. 13 ; Isa. li. 17). The wine is mingled. We must pray for guidance, that we may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good ; that we may be able to say, *The Lord . . . is the portion of my cup* (Isa. vii. 15 ; Ps. xvi. 5). If to us our lot seems hard, let us strive to say with our Master, *The cup which the Father hath given me, shall I not drink it ?* (S. John xviii. 11).

THE REMEMBRANCE OF A SONG

"I call to remembrance my song in the night: I commune with mine own heart; and my spirit made diligent search."
PSALM lxxvii. 6.

LIKE so many of the Psalms, this begins in the minor key. It tells of a day of trouble, a trouble which banished sleep from the writer's eyes. But, if in this it resembles many other Psalms, it strikes also a note of its own, a note of comfort in the remembrance of past joy, of a song composed in happier days.

I. The occupations of a sleepless night. It is useless to prolong into the night the troubles of the day; and therefore, in order to pass the weary hours, the Psalmist considers the past, making diligent search for some ray of consolation in the recollection of God's dealings with him in the years that have gone. *My spirit made diligent search.* He seems to have begun with self-examination, in order that he might discover the cause of God's displeasure, the sin which was at the root of it. Then he turns away from himself to God's treatment of His chosen people in the days of old, when God's faithfulness and mercy was proved again and again in times of affliction. It is often helpful to read the lives of the saints, and to recall how God proved them by many a sorrow and trial, and yet never suffered them to be tempted above that they were able (cf. 1 Cor. x. 13). As Ahasuerus, on that memorable night when he could not sleep, called for the records of the chronicles of his kingdom, and therein found something he had thanklessly forgotten, the account of how he had been delivered from the machinations of traitors in his own household (cf. Esther vi. 1, 2); so the troubled soul should betake itself to the records of God's kingdom, written in the Word of God, and learn from reading of God's goodness to others to look hopefully for God's aid in its own trouble.

II. Then the poet turns to similar experiences in his own life. He recalls past seasons of trouble, and while remembering their bitterness, he recollects how they all

in the end gave place to happiness and prosperity. Surely he learned that though *weeping may tarry for the night joy cometh in the morning*, that *whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth* (Ps. xxx. 5 ; Heb. xii. 6), that chastisement is the mark of fatherly love, a recognition of true sonship, not a token of rejection. There comes to his mind one of those blessed seasons when, in the enjoyment of restoration to God's favour, he composed a song of thanksgiving and joy ; and as he recalls that song he encourages himself with the hope that, as on that occasion, God will not forget to be gracious to him (cf. v. 9), but will restore to him once again the joy of His conscious Presence. As bees in the winter sustain themselves from the old store of honey which they gathered during the previous summer, when the sun was shining brightly and the flowers were rich with nectar, so we in the winter of affliction should find solace and sustenance by feeding upon the memories of God's goodness to us in the past, when we tasted the sweetness of His gifts.

III. We are pilgrims of the night. How much the safety and success of our journeys depend on our resourcefulness in the many emergencies which arise during our pilgrimage, and which must be met and overcome, if we are to reach our destination, the City of our King. We know that we must expect times of great trial, when obstacles of all sorts will bar our progress and threaten perhaps our very existence, when our spiritual foes may seem for the moment victorious. We need then to have all our resources at hand ready to fall back on, and our plan of defence prepared. Surely, at such a time, our strength must be perfect trust in God, based upon our remembrance of deliverances in the past, to call to mind our song of thanksgiving for a former preservation.

THE DESERTION OF EPHRAIM

"The children of Ephraim, being armed and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle."—PSALM lxxviii. 9.

IN this, the longest of the historical Psalms, the history of Israel is briefly recapitulated. The purpose of this appeal to the past is to rebuke the sin of ingratitude and rebellion so frequent among God's people. In this Ephraim is singled out for special reprobation as the leader of the earlier apostasy of God's children, and the type of faithlessness and untrustworthiness. This is not denounced merely in a passing verse, but again, near the close of the Psalm, the rejection of Ephraim and the choice of Judah are dwelt upon with almost triumphant satisfaction. These latter verses (67-72) seem to fix the date of the Psalm as written after the defection of the ten tribes.

I. Ephraim, from the days when Joshua was appointed to succeed Moses until the establishment of the monarchy under Saul, was the leading tribe. It was the richest, and had the largest population; in their territory, at Shiloh, was the religious capital of the nation, while Shechem was the gathering place of the tribes. Among their famous men they counted Joseph, Joshua, and Gideon. They were especially the military tribe, and yet in the day of battle, though fully armed, they turned back. It is doubtful to what battle this refers: many think to no particular occasion, but to the general ill-success of Israel under the leadership of Ephraim during the whole period of the Judges. Joshua, himself an Ephraimite, seems to reproach his tribe with not obeying God's command to drive out the Canaanites (Josh. xvii. 14-18). And Hosea, a prophet of the northern kingdom, everywhere speaks of them with condemnation (cf. Hos. iv. 17; v. 3, 14; vii. 1-11, etc.).

II. The sin of Ephraim. In order to estimate this we need to realize how, more abundantly than any other tribe, Ephraim had been dowered with gifts and opportunities. These endowments were entrusted to Ephraim to be used in God's service and for the furtherance of His purposes in the establishment of Israel in Canaan. In this

service Ephraim conspicuously failed, and the specially recorded instance of this failure is that when fully armed and equipped for warfare they turned back in the day of battle. In other words, that in a great crisis they were untrue to their duty. They deserted their brethren in the hour of danger, and probably left them to bear the consequences of their cowardice. The cause of their defection seems to be indicated in the previous verse—*A generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not steadfast.* They were content to rule in times of prosperity, but refused to fight in the day of adversity.

III. We cannot escape responsibility for our gifts and opportunities ; for to whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required (S. Luke xii. 48). There are many fair-weather Christians, who would enjoy all the benefits of Christ's religion, but are unwilling to fulfil the painful duties it involves. And the cause of this is that their heart is not right with God, it is not set on God's work, not devoted to His interests. They are therefore not steadfast, not trustworthy, not to be relied upon in time of emergency. In the day of the Church's conflicts they are a source of weakness to her, for they turn back, and desert her banner. How is it with me ? Is my heart right with God, am I steadfast in His service ? In the day of trouble should I be able to endure unto the end ? for it is only they that endure who shall be saved (cf. S. Matt. xxiv. 13).

THE PENITENCE OF FEAR

"When He slew them, then they inquired after Him : And they returned and sought God early. And they remembered that God was their Rock, and the Most High God their Redeemer. But they flattered Him with their mouth, and lied unto Him with their tongue. For their heart was not right with Him."
—PSALM lxxviii. 34-37.

TROUBLE and affliction are among God's best gifts to His children. To those who are faithful they provide opportunities of testing, of discipline leading to development, of bearing the Cross for love of Christ. To the unfaithful they are God's call to repentance, perhaps a last opportunity of returning to a state of grace. We are taught this by the parable of the unfruitful fig tree, with the intercession of the vinedresser, *Lord, let it alone this year also . . . and if it bear fruit henceforth, well; but if not, Thou shalt cut it down* (S. Luke xiii. 8, 9).

I. Trouble drives us to God, when nothing else will, e.g., Joseph's brethren, the widow of Zarephath, Jonah, etc. (cf. Gen. xlii. 21; 1 Kings xvii. 18; Jon. ii. 1). It awakens conscience and destroys the illusions of life. The Israelites when He slew them sought God early (or earnestly). In their terror they could not be too zealous. *They remembered that God was their Rock and . . . their Redeemer.* They had forgotten this in their prosperity. This, indeed, was God's loving purpose in sending them affliction; and, if only they had been sincere, God would have pardoned them; for He was *full of compassion . . . Yea, many a time turned He His anger away* (v. 38). *But they flattered Him with their mouth and lied unto Him with their tongue.*

Again and again, the story of the Exodus supplies us with examples of superficial and insincere repentance, a turning to God from fear, not from love. They were very earnest in seeking God that He might remove His judgments from them and take away their affliction, not that He might cure them of their sins, and give them grace to walk in the way of His commandments.

II. The great difference between true and false penitence is that the former consists of an intense desire to be saved from sin, the latter only from the consequences of sin. The sincere penitent prays, Lord, only forgive me my sin, and punish me as Thou knowest to be best for me. The false penitent prays with all his might that the penalty of sin may be taken away ; and, when it is entirely removed, he goes back to his sin. The Israelites, when they saw their brethren all round them dying of the bites of the fiery serpents, fearing lest they should be slain in like manner, begged Moses to pray that the Lord would take away the serpents from them (cf. Num. xxi. 6, 7) ; but, soon after they were delivered from these, they began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab, and joined in the worship of Baal-peor (cf. Num. xxv. 1-3).

III. The lives of many sinners are a continual round of sin, intermitted with periods of terror, when the effects of their sin are manifested in sickness, disgrace, or punishment. This is followed by an insincere repentance, when they seem in a desperate hurry to escape from the trouble they have brought upon themselves. Then, as the punishment is removed, they gradually go back to their sin, as the sow that had been washed returned to its wallowing in the mire (cf. 2 S. Peter ii. 22). But when another visitation of judgment once more arouses the fear of God, the round of alternate penitence and sin begins again. Can any life be more wretched than this ? Yet, it is the experience of many, who for the gratification, for a brief period, of unholy desires, forfeit the happiness which might be theirs in this world, and lose the eternal felicity of heaven.

CONVERSION

“Turn us again, O Lord God of Hosts ; Cause Thy face to shine, and we shall be saved.”—PSALM lxxx. 19.

THRICE in the Psalm is this verse repeated (vv. 3, 7, 19). It is familiar to us as a versicle and response, having passed into the Offices of the Church, and being used daily in the Preces at Lauds, Vespers, and Compline, and in the Office for the Peace of the Church. It is of importance as setting before us the dogma that grace is the prevenient cause of conversion, of penitence, and indeed, of all motions of goodness in man. It is interesting to find that what afterwards became a doctrine of Christianity was recognized so many centuries before by the writer of this Psalm.

I. The effects of sin are twofold. First, the aversion of the soul from God, and then, the aversion of God from the soul. God does not withdraw His grace from man until man has turned away from Him. And the same order is observed in man's return to God. Thus saith the Lord of Hosts ; *Return unto Me, saith the Lord of Hosts, and I will return unto you* (Zech. i. 3). And in the N.T., *Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you* (S. Jas. iv. 8). There is, however, the difficulty, that man in a state of sin, and under its bondage, is unable to return to God, unless by the operation of the Holy Ghost God draws Him. *Draw me ; we will run after Thee. I will run the way of Thy commandments, when Thou shalt enlarge my heart* (Cant. i. 4 ; Ps. cxix. 32). This drawing is what is known in theology as “exciting or preventing” grace ; and is the primary and moving cause of every good impulse in man. It is the operation of the Holy Spirit upon the soul, awakening in it the consciousness of sin and the desire for pardon, and drawing it to God.

II. *Turn us again, O Lord God of Hosts.* Conversion, turning again to God, is the first step in the way of penitence. It is a turning of the will to God. It must not be confused with regeneration, which is effected only by a definite sacrament, Baptism. This can only be received once, but conversion, from its very nature, may take place

more than once ; for whenever we turn away from God by yielding to mortal sin, the act by which we turn to Him with the determination to repent is an act of conversion. Our Lord taught the necessity of conversion for all, when he said to His disciples, *Except ye turn, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter the kingdom of heaven.* We are always progressing in the direction in which our will is turned ; hence the importance of asking ourselves frequently the question, Am I now converted ? or, Do I need conversion ? i.e., to change the direction of my will from sin to God ?

III. The effects of conversion are many ; two only are indicated in the text—the shining upon us of the face of God, that is, restoration to His love and favour, and therefore our salvation. Life in the Presence of God is a foretaste of heaven upon earth. For it is to bask in the sunshine of His love. It brings with it two great sources of joy :

i. I am pleasing to God as His child. I am certain of the care of my Heavenly Father, and therefore can lack nothing that is for my good. This will not exempt me from sorrow and suffering ; but the trials I have to bear are lightened by the assurance that God will give grace to bear them, and that in their loving endurance I have an opportunity of proving my sonship and responding to God's love.

ii. Then it answers the great question of the spiritual life—Shall I be saved ? It does not make me certain of final perseverance ; for that depends upon my faithfulness in the use of grace ; but it does assure me of the fact that I am now in the state of salvation.

GOD'S SORROW AT MAN'S FOLLY

"Oh that My people would hearken unto Me, that Israel would walk in My ways! I should soon subdue their enemies, and turn My hand against their adversaries."—PSALM lxxxii. 13, 14.

THESE pathetic words, expressive of God's love for His people, carry us in thought to the Palm Sunday scene of Jesus weeping, and uttering His lament over the doomed city of Jerusalem.

I. The first thing we notice here is God's recognition of the human will. It was God's will to deliver Israel from her enemies, but His purpose is defeated by her persistent refusal to walk in His ways. The Law had been given them to direct their paths, Prophets had been sent to them; but they turned a deaf ear to the messages, hardened their hearts, and went their own way. Then we may observe how suggestively "hearing" and "doing" are set before us as two distinct stages in the life of obedience—*Oh that My people would hearken unto Me, that Israel would walk in My ways!* There are many that *hear*, but *do not*. They disregard the commandment that has been given them, and keep on in their evil course. Herod heard S. John the Baptist gladly, but obeyed the daughter of Herodias rather than him. Felix was terrified as he heard S. Paul reasoning of righteousness, and temperance, and the judgment to come; and he sent for him often that he might commune with him. But he did not act upon what he heard by becoming a Christian, nor did it lead him to do even the simple act of justice of releasing S. Paul.

II. But what was the peculiar calamity of the Israelites which called forth these words of sorrow? It was God's knowledge of the consequences of their folly. If, as God's children, they had rendered obedience, He would soon have subdued their enemies. Their disobedience made this deliverance impossible, and involved them in further disasters. And God, Who loved them, was grieved at the misery which He knew they must suffer. If we now turn to our Lord's lament over Jerusalem, we shall see that the

cause of His tears was the same. The Father, Who had previously sent His servants the prophets, had now sent to them His Son. The Jews, represented by Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, admitting the fact of Christ's many miracles, and foreseeing that "all men will believe on Him," determine to put Jesus to death, lest the religious excitement caused by His teaching should lead to Roman interference, resulting in the loss to them of their offices, and to the nation of its autonomy (cf. S. John xi. 47-53). Our Lord, looking into the future, sees that the doom of Jerusalem is inevitable, unless the nation recognizes the time of its visitation, and hearkens to their last call from God. He foresees the terrible calamity which is impending, the siege of the City, and the horrible destruction of its inhabitants. And He weeps at the thought of the final catastrophe which is the consequence of the rejection of their last call to repentance (cf. S. Luke xix. 41-44).

III. Is not this, to us as individuals, a warning, full of encouragement, if we hearken, and obey? but fraught with judgment, if we disregard it? For each of us, the enemies are the habits of sin which we have allowed to lead captive our soul. We grow weary of resisting these sins; and by yielding to them we only forge the fetters which bind us more entirely in a hopeless captivity. And yet, the means of grace are still availing. God longs to come to our deliverance. But we must show ourselves desirous of His help, and ready to fulfil the conditions upon which it is freely given. What are they? Repentance, the breaking away from our sins. In this passage we have the assurance that if only we persevere in the struggle a little longer, God will soon subdue our enemies, and free us from their tyranny.

THE VALE OF TEARS

"Blessed is the man whose strength is in Thee ; in whose heart are the highways (to Zion). Passing through the Valley of Weeping they make it a place of springs ; Yea, the early rain covereth it with blessings."—PSALM lxxxiv. 5, 6.

ON account of its exceeding beauty this has been called the Pearl of Psalms. It is evidently one of those sung in the great pilgrimages to Jerusalem to keep the Feasts. In the preceding verse we have the blessedness of fruition, in this the blessedness of hope. They are indeed blessed who have reached the goal, and rest from their labours ; but in his degree the pilgrim too is blessed who, leaning on his rod and his staff, toils onward through this vale of tears towards his heavenly home.

I. Blessed is the man whose strength is in Thee ; in whose heart are the highways (to Zion). Bearing in mind that this is a pilgrim-psalm, we are here taught the two chief things needed by the pilgrim—that God should be his strength, and that he should carry in his heart the spiritual chart of the highway which leads to Heaven. The words "to Zion" are not in the Hebrew, but are suggested by the fact that it is a Psalm of Pilgrimage. This pilgrimage represents to each of us our journey through life, with its hardships and perils, and with its goal, the heavenly Jerusalem. The perils can be met successfully, and the hardships endured and overcome, only by those who, distrusting themselves, put all their trust in God ; who realize their own weakness, but have perfect faith that the grace of God is sufficient for them and will be given to them in abundant measure in answer to prayer. We need, however, something more, a clear conception of the road we must travel, and whither it leads. This demands more than an intellectual mastery of the principles of the spiritual life. It requires that they should be engraved in our hearts, engrossing our thoughts and constituting the ruling passion of our lives. Heaven is our Home, and how to get there must be the dominant interest of our whole life.

II. The Valley of Weeping. The valley of Baca (either of weeping or of mulberry or balsam trees) by some has been identified with the last station of the caravan route from the north to Jerusalem. Mystically, it signifies this life which on this account has been called The Vale of Tears. It is *a dry and weary land, where no water is* (Ps. lxxiii. 1). We have to pass through it, and we must so use it, by God's grace and our own efforts, that it may become to us "a place of springs." The very difficulties in our path, by driving us to God for help, turn out for the furtherance of our pilgrimage (cf. Phil. i. 12). We need to pray most earnestly for light to see the road, and grace to persevere in walking in the way of God's appointment, so that "per crucem" we may come "ad lucem." We read the thrilling story of one afflicted man, who prayed with such fervency and such importunity for light, that, when his eyes were opened, he followed Jesus in the way going up to Jerusalem (cf. S. Mark x. 46-52), the way that led through the Cross and Passion, through the grave and gate of death, to the glorious resurrection and wonderful ascension by which our Lord passed to the throne of His Kingdom in Heaven.

III. In the spiritual life, where trials are greatest, grace doth most abound, where the ground is driest the most plenteous showers descend in fulfilment of the promise *I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and streams upon the dry ground* (Isa. xlv. 3). Only we must be thirsty for the waters of life, for the gifts of the Spirit. In this Vale of Tears, let us remember Christ's words, *Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. They are but the fulfilment of the Psalmist's promise, They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. Though he goeth on his way weeping, bearing forth the seed, He shall come again with joy, bringing his sheaves with him* (Ps. cxxvi. 5, 6).

THE MYSTERY OF THE CROSS

"Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other."—PSALM lxxxv. 10.

S. BERNARD, preaching on this verse, remarks that it is a deep mystery, and deserves to be diligently examined. He refers it to the loss by the Fall of the four virtues enumerated in it; and their recovery by the second Adam at the Incarnation. But may we not see in it a prophecy and revelation of the Atonement? For where more than on the Cross do we find the meeting of mercy and truth, the union of righteousness and peace? For lack of space let us confine ourselves to the consideration of the first.

I. Two views of God are found side by side all down the long stream of history. The view that God is a hard and stern Being, exacting to the uttermost obedience to His Law, and punishing inevitably the transgressor. We see this theory exemplified in the Old World by the Stoic philosophy in the sternness and austerity of its ethical doctrines, and we find it in the religion of the Pharisees with its meticulous enforcement of every jot and tittle of Rabbinic teaching. It is set forth in the Gospel by the servant who kept his pound laid up in a napkin, because he thought his Lord an austere man, taking up what he did not lay down, and reaping that which he did not sow (cf. S. Luke xix. 20-24). We find it to-day in the Calvinist, who professes to believe that God created the greater part of mankind only for eternal damnation.

On the other hand, in the view of the majority God is regarded as a kind-hearted, easy-going Being, so tender-hearted that He will somehow pardon everyone. This opinion is exemplified by the Epicureans, by the Sadducees, and in our own times by a great multitude who profess to believe in God, but make no effort to keep His commandments or to serve Him.

II. Between the two stands the Cross of Christ, with its revelation of God's view of the malice of sin, but also of His love for the sinner. The Cross says in effect, See what sin does. It crucifies all that is best in man. See what

it cost God to provide a means by which sin might be forgiven. Behold the truth of God's proclamation—*The Lord, the Lord, a God . . . that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children,* etc. (Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7). On the other hand, the Cross is the proclamation of God's wondrous love and mercy. *For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have eternal life* (S. John iii. 16). But this is what the proclamation in Exodus, just quoted, would lead us to expect; for the passage omitted at the dots is *a God full of compassion and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy and truth . . . forgiving iniquity and transgressions and sin.*

III. In this verse one aspect of the Atonement is set forth. That in His infinite wisdom and love God devised a means of atonement for sin which vindicated the truth and justice of God by the fearful penalty for sin paid willingly on the Cross by the Son of God. With that before him, man could never again have an excuse for thinking that sin was a light thing, or that God was easy-going in the atonement by which sin was remitted. On the other hand God's mercy, His tender love and compassion for sinful man was manifested in a way to appeal to all that was best in man. On the Cross mercy and truth met together, God and man were reconciled, and the effects of this reconciliation were righteousness and peace in the soul of the sinner, where before all had been sin and warfare.

A MIRROR OF PRAYER

"Bow down Thine ear, O Lord, and answer me; for I am poor and needy. Preserve my soul; for I am godly: O Thou my God, save Thy servant that trusteth in Thee. . . ."
—PSALM lxxxvi. 1-7.

THIS Psalm is specially marked by the use of the Divine Name—"Adonai," which occurs seven times. Though in the title assigned to David, it is evidently of later date, and some have suggested Hezekiah as its author. It draws largely upon earlier Psalms. Its construction is irregular, but we may trace three divisions, each ending with a note of gratitude or confidence. The first consists of a very earnest prayer, written under great affliction or trouble, and affords a most helpful model of what prayer should be. The petitions are substantially the same, and yet they are none of them vain repetitions, but rather the eloquent pleading of a soul with God. Let us consider them. We may notice the striking interweaving of petitions and pleas.

I. *Bow down Thine ear, O Lord, and answer me; for I am poor and needy.* The realization of his lowliness and weakness seems to suggest that, unless God in His condescension bows down His ear to Him, his feeble prayer will never reach the throne of grace, and be heard. Just as it is necessary for the physician, if he is to understand, to put his ear close to a sick man's lips, that he may catch the feeble words which, in his weakness, the patient can only whisper.

II. *Then, Preserve my soul; for I am one whom thou lovest* (or who hast been graciously dealt with by Thee). The renderings, "I am holy" or "I am godly," are most unfortunate. The plea is not based on any assumed merit of his own, but on God's goodness, as is clear from *For Thou, Lord, art good* (v. 5). He is pleading his covenant relation to God (as the adj. *châsid* implies), and therefore asks that his soul may be preserved in the trouble which threatens.

III. *Save Thy servant that trusteth in Thee.* Note the gradual increase in the intensity of the petitions, reaching

a climax in this, *Save me*. Listen to me, answer me, keep my soul, save me ! And here the plea is his trust in God. We are reminded of the climax of our *Te Deum*—"O Lord, in Thee have I trusted ; let me never be confounded."

IV. *Be merciful unto me, O Lord ; for unto Thee do I cry all the day long* (v. 3). Perhaps in his afflictions the writer recognized the hand of God, and therefore seeks for mercy on the plea of his perseverance in prayer. This is an anticipation of our Lord's teaching in the parables of The Unjust Judge and The Friend at Midnight (cf. S. Luke xviii. 1-8 ; xi. 5-13).

V. *Rejoice the soul of Thy servant ; for unto Thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul* (v. 4). This is the antithesis of the first petition, *Bow down Thine ear*. That is what he began by asking God to do. Now his plea implies that he is doing his part by lifting up his soul to God ; and he tells of the joy he anticipates when his prayer is answered. He adds a most prevailing plea—*For Thou Lord art good, and ready to forgive, and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon Thee* (v. 5).

VI. *Give ear, O Lord, unto my prayer ; and hearken unto the voice of my supplications* (v. 6). This is practically a repetition of the first petition.

VII. *In the day of my trouble I will call upon Thee : for Thou wilt answer me* (v. 7). Thus ends the prayer with an expression of determination always to have recourse to God in the day of trouble, the final plea being an act of faith that God always answers prayer.

If we were to pray like this, how much more fruitful our supplications would be !

THE FIRST THING TO PRAY FOR

“Teach me Thy way, O Lord, I will walk in Thy truth : Unite my heart to fear Thy Name.”—PSALM lxxxvi. 11.

OUR Lord, when teaching His disciples to pray, tells them to say, first, *Hallowed be Thy Name*, that is to think of God's glory before their own personal needs, whether of food, pardon, or deliverance from evil. In our text the Psalmist anticipates this ; for, although he is afflicted and sore oppressed, his prayer is not for deliverance from these things, but that he may walk in the way and in the truth of God, and so glorify His holy Name. It has been pointed out that since “walk” is equivalent to “life,” we have here set forth as the object of the soul's first quest, that which can only be found in Christ, Who said, *I am the way, and the truth, and the life : no one cometh unto the Father but by Me* (S. John xiv. 6).

I. The essence of all true religion is the Fear of God. That is the beginning of wisdom, for it is the foundation upon which all the superstructure of the worship and service of God must be built. A man must be a God-fearing man, if he is to be a true Christian. Moreover, the heart must be wholly given to God. This is the substance of the prayer—*Unite my heart to fear Thy Name*. “Unite my heart” is a peculiar expression, but its significance is far reaching. The heart is here regarded as in a state of disunion and distraction on account of the many desires, interests, and passions, which appeal to the human heart, and so divide it that it ceases to be a united heart, and becomes instead a most distracted one. How often in the Psalms this danger is recognized, and the writer resolves to pray, or praise, or give thanks, *with his whole heart* (cf. Ps. ix. 1 ; lxxxvi. 12 ; cxix. 2, 10, 34, 58, 69, 145). Our Lord too warns us against this peril, especially in the form of anxiety about food and clothing, when He says, *No man can serve two masters*, and, later, adds, *Seek ye first His kingdom and His righteousness* (S. Matt. vi. 24-34).

II. Passing over the confusion of the soul occasioned by the seductions of the world and of the appetites of our

lower nature, there remains a host of distractions which belong peculiarly to the sphere of the spiritual life, and which, while in themselves only venial sins, do much to spoil our fellowship with God and to mar our joy in devotion. Among these we may notice public and private prayer. How difficult it is to keep our minds fixed upon the subject of our petition, to keep ourselves uninterruptedly in the Presence of God, to Whom we are speaking. Trains of thought which seem quite irrelevant sweep over our souls, and interests, which at other times would have little attraction for us, all at once demand immediate consideration. This is largely the penalty of the loss of the power of concentration caused by past unfaithfulness, and the result is that we are unable to give our undivided attention to the petitions which we are offering before the throne of grace. If this be so with our prayers, the difficulty is even greater in the public worship of the Church and in the offering of the Holy Sacrifice, when Jesus Himself is present upon the Altar as the object of our love and adoration.

III. Then when we go forth from our closet to the work of the day, and especially to that part of our work which is concerned with the service of God, how persistently Satan assaults us with distractions which impair the efficiency of our work, or render it worthless, because the motive is not the single desire for God's glory. In the Sermon on the Mount Christ shows that religious acts are judged by their inner motive not by their amount. If they are done to be seen of men, or with a view also to some material advantage to ourselves, their spiritual value is entirely destroyed. How earnestly then we need to pray that God will unite our heart to fear His Name, that we may praise Him with our whole heart.

THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD

"I will sing of the mercies of the Lord for ever : With my mouth will I make known Thy faithfulness to all generations. For I have said, Mercy shall be built up for ever ; Thy faithfulness shalt Thou establish in the very heavens."—PSALM lxxxix. 1, 2.

THIS Psalm appears to have been written in the last days of the monarchy ; probably in the time of the youthful Jehoiachin, who, after a brief reign of three months, was deposed and imprisoned by Nebuchadnezzar. The throne of David was then either tottering to its fall or had already fallen. The lamentation of Jeremiah (xxii. 24-30) seems to be an evidence that Jehoiachin was beloved by his subjects, and the Prophet and Psalmist unite in an ode of sorrow, as they behold the last hope of David's house perish. The covenant to which the Psalm refers (vv. 3, 4) is that recorded in 2 Sam. vii. 8-11.

I. The first section of the Psalm (vv. 1-37) is a grateful acknowledgment of God's faithfulness to His promises throughout all the generations which succeeded David, up to the reign of Jehoiachin. The covenant itself is described at length, and God's mercies during this period are set forth in a hymn of surpassing beauty, which treats of the greatness of God, of the reverence and worship due to Him, of His power as manifested in nature, of His deliverance of Israel from the oppression of Egypt, and of His gracious dealings with David, and of the promise to him of protection from enemies and the establishment of his kingdom. It concludes with a warning of punishment, if his children forsake God's law ; and yet with a promise of restoration. Thus far the Psalm is a splendid hymn of praise. Then (at v. 38) it suddenly changes, and takes the form of a mournful elegy on the downfall and destruction of the kingdom. This latter part needs to be read in connection with the last half of the Book of Jeremiah (from c. xxii. on), in which are supplied the details of the brief reigns of the last king and the carrying into captivity of the people.

II. *Lord, where are Thy former mercies, which Thou swarest unto David in Thy faithfulness?* This expresses the sense of perplexity at the contrast between the glorious promises so faithfully fulfilled in the past and the utter ruin which threatened Israel in the present. To the ordinary Jew it was inexplicable. To the prophet there was the vision of restoration after seventy years of captivity. To us, in the light of subsequent history, the explanation is found in the fact that Judaism was but the first stage in the salvation of the human race, and that in David's greater Son, the Messiah, God's covenant is being perfectly fulfilled, and in Him are all the families of the earth being blessed (cf. Gen. xii. 3). *Where are Thy former mercies?* For the Psalmist had sung, *Mercy shall be built up for ever* (v. 2). And the story of God's dealings with man justifies this. Creation was the initial mercy of God Who is love; for creation was the outpouring of that love upon the creatures. This beautiful world with its teeming life bears witness to the love and mercy of God. Then, after the Fall, the next stage begins with the gradual restoration of man by a slow educational process by which man was being prepared for Redemption. The call of Abraham, the training of his descendants until they were fit for their mission to teach the world of the One God with Whom they had been brought into covenant-relation. From them, after long discipline of adversity, Christ is born, the world redeemed, and a new era, under which we live, was inaugurated.

III. It remains for us to carry on Christ's work of mercy in building up His kingdom, preparing now the living stones for the walls of the New Jerusalem, the City of our God, in which throughout eternity shall be sung the glorious Hymn which this Psalm, in its earlier portion, foreshadows.

THE BLESSING OF KNOWLEDGE

“Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: They walk, O Lord, in the light of Thy countenance. In Thy Name do they rejoice all the day: And in Thy righteousness are they exalted.”—PSALM LXXXIX. 15, 16.

THE joyful sound here referred to is the blowing of the trumpet of the Jubilee on the evening of the Great Day of Atonement, which ushered in the year of release, when all debts were cancelled, all Hebrew bondmen set free, and every man returned to his own family and to the enjoyment of his inheritance and possession (cf. Lev. xxv. 8-10).

I. There is no part of the Jewish ritual more solemn in itself, or more full of instruction for us, than the yearly observance of the Day of Atonement, and especially that Great Day of Atonement which, every forty-nine years, introduced with the blowing of trumpets the Year of Release, the Year of Jubilee. The ritual itself prefigures to us the sacrifice of Himself by which our Lord Jesus Christ made atonement for the sins of the world. We commemorate that day each year on our Good Friday.

II. The joyful sound of the trumpet brought to the debtor and bondman the news of his freedom; but as the joy of Jubilee did not come till after the Day of Atonement, so no Gospel joy and liberty are ours till we *know* Christ as our Saviour, our Atonement. We must notice the word “*know*” where we might have expected “*hear*.” It suggests to us the difference between *hearing about* Christ and *knowing* Christ. Thousands upon thousands hear about Christ, about His life and death, and about the salvation He won for them upon the Cross; but how few of these really know Christ as their own Saviour! It is, however, only those who thus know Him *who walk in the light of His countenance*. Our days in this valley of shadows are often darkened by sorrow and adversity, but even then, if we are walking in the light of Christ’s countenance, there will be rays of sunshine piercing the gloom and filling our hearts with joy. For, if only we have *known* the

joyful sound, in the sense of having appropriated it, it has told us of forgiveness of all the sins of the past, of freedom from their bondage, and of a gift of a new life. For *if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature: the old things are passed away; behold, they are become new* (2 Cor. v. 17).

III. One supreme question forces itself upon every thinking man, How shall I pass my life in this world? It will not continue for very many years, but its effects will be lasting. I shall leave it, when the hour of death comes, with a character, formed for good or evil, upon which my happiness or my misery throughout eternity will depend. S. Paul draws for us a picture of those who walk by the Spirit and of those who walk by the flesh, and of the fruits of each life. Among the chief fruits of the Spirit he sketches in nine glorious virtues—*love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, temperance*. How great will be the happiness of those who carry such a character into their life in Heaven! In contrast, he gives us a list of some of the works of the flesh—*fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousies, wraths, factions, divisions, heresies, envyings, drunkenness, revellings, and such like*. And he warns us, *that they which practise such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God* (cf. Gal. v. 16-25).

We have to choose a walk in life, for we must pass through it. Can we choose one better than this? They who walk by the Spirit walk in the light of God's countenance; in His Name they rejoice all the day, and in His righteousness they are exalted. This is the best way of walking through life, the happiest here, and leading to the happiness of Heaven.

THE SOLEMNITY OF LIFE

"So teach us to number our days, that we may get us an heart of wisdom."—PSALM XC. 12.

IN the title, the Psalm is assigned to Moses. The loftiness of its thought, the majesty of its language, and the originality of its style and diction, have been pleaded in support of this ; but, on the other hand, the ancient and mediæval commentators almost without exception, and the majority of modern critics are against its Mosaic authorship. The Psalm falls into two well-defined divisions.

I. First, a meditation on the eternity of God as contrasted with the weakness and transitoriness of man (vv. 1-12). II. Then, a prayer to God that He will have compassion upon Israel notwithstanding her sins, and give to her joy for sorrow (vv. 13-15), and establish her work.

I. In verses 12, the beginning of the second division of the Psalm, we have a prayer based upon the preceding meditation on the shortness and transitoriness of human life. In it the practical conclusion which flows from the premises which have been laid down is put in the form of a supplication for wisdom. Our days are as a watch in the night, they are as a sleep, they end as a tale that is told, even the longest and strongest life is but labour and sorrow ; for it is soon gone, and we fly away (cf. vv. 4-10). Such being the character of our life, we ought to reflect upon its gravity ; so that we may get a wise and understanding heart to guide us in the disposal of our time, and in the best use of our opportunities (cf. Eph. v. 16) in preparation for eternity. This seems so self-evident that we may ask why it should be necessary to pray that we may see this. There are three reasons. First, because we so dislike the task, we so shrink from facing the truth about it. Then, because we persuade ourselves that we have no need to do so yet, that we have plenty of time. The rich farmer thought he could count on many years. But God said unto him, Thou foolish one, this night is thy soul required of thee (S. Luke xii. 20). Lastly, because we so love the world that we hate to think of leaving it.

II. There is something very solemn in life's anniversaries—our birthdays or the close of the year. For each reminds us how swiftly our days are passing, and calls us to consider how we are spending them. Life is short, and there is so much to be accomplished in it. It is the school-time of eternity. As in our school-days examinations from time to time test our progress ; so in the numbering of our days we ought to examine carefully what preparation we are making for the life of eternity. Life is the sowing-time for the harvest of Heaven. We should take stock frequently of what we are sowing, with a view to estimate what we may expect to reap.

III. The purpose for which we are to number our days is to get an heart of wisdom. But of what kind of wisdom ? Most people spend much time in acquiring the wisdom of this world, a wisdom which will make their worldly life a success, which will enable them to hold their own in the struggle for money, or power, or worldly honours. But in view of the shortness and uncertainty of life, is this worth while ? We cannot have many years here to enjoy these things. Moreover, in old age the capacity to enjoy such things decreases. And of what value will they be to us in the world beyond ? Nay, may they not even be found obstacles to entering the kingdom of heaven. For Christ said, *How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God* (S. Mark x. 23). The wisdom we must seek is that which is from above—*first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits* (S. James iii. 17).

GOD OUR REFUGE AND FORTRESS

"He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my Refuge and my Fortress; my God, in Whom I trust."—PSALM xci. 1, 2.

THE theme of this exquisite Psalm is God's loving care for His children and the perfect peace and security of those who make Him their Refuge. It has been said that "the language is the language of a father, growing ever more fatherly as it proceeds, till at last the Great Father takes it up, and declares His truth and faithfulness." The whole Psalm is strikingly reminiscent of the words of Eliphaz the Temanite, in which he describes the good man's life (cf. Job v. 17-27).

I. The structure of the Psalm is peculiar. The writer states his theme that *He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty*. And then, emboldened by it, makes his own act of faith—*He is my Refuge and my Fortress, my God, in Whom I trust*. Another speaker is then introduced who encourages him with the promise of God's protection (vv. 3-8). In our translation (at verse 9), the first speaker interrupts with another act of faith—*Thou, O Lord, art my Refuge!* Some, however, with the R.V. margin, render this, *Because thou hast said, The Lord is my Refuge*; thus avoiding the interruption and leaving the passage down to the end of verse 13 to the first speaker. The last section (vv. 14-16) is uttered in the Person of Jehovah.

II. *The secret place of the Most High*. What is it? For the Jew it was the Holy of Holies whether in the temple or the tabernacle, where was the Ark with the Mercy Seat and the Cherubim. Into this the High Priest entered only once a year with the blood of the sacrifice to make atonement for himself and for his people. At all other times the Holy of Holies remained untenanted, save by the Presence of God; for there from between the Cherubim God's glory shone forth, and there He was therefore said to dwell. But between it and the Holy Place was the curtain

or veil of the Temple which shut out all direct approach to God's Presence and told of man's alienation from God on account of his sin.

For us the secret place of the Most High is in Heaven, where our Great High Priest ever liveth to make intercession for us. The rending of the veil of the temple, at the moment when by Christ's death sin was atoned for, signified our free access to the Father, our entrance into the true Holy of Holies. For the Ascension Day collect tells us that since "our Lord Jesus Christ has ascended into the heavens, we may also in heart and mind thither ascend, and with Him continually dwell." And He that dwelleth there shall indeed abide under the shadow of the Almighty, sheltered from the scorching heat of life's trials and temptations, and protected from the assaults of all our spiritual foes.

III. *He is my God, in Whom I trust.* This is the climax to what precedes. To be able to say from the heart, He is *my* God, is man's highest achievement ; for it tells of the greatness of the treasure that is his, a treasure indeed laid up in Heaven, nothing less than the possession of God Himself. It is the anticipation of the seal of salvation ; for *He that overcometh . . . I will write upon him the Name of my God . . . and Mine own New Name* (Rev. iii. 12).

Many of us say this Psalm every night in the Office for Compline ; let us try to say it all in the light of this first verse, that is, of the promise of God's care for them who can make the act of faith—He is *my* God.

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF JEHOVAH

"The Lord reigneth; He is apparelled with majesty; The Lord is apparelled, He hath girded Himself with strength."
—PSALM xciii. 1.

LIKE the preceding Psalm, this seems to have formed part of the Sabbath worship; and is still a Friday Psalm in the Synagogue use. One of those magnificent Psalms in which Jehovah's reign is described (cf. Ps. xlvii. 8; xcvi. 10; xcvi. 1; xcix. 1), it supplies a brief but impressive commentary on that fundamental truth which is our comfort and strength in times of disorder and injustice—*The Lord reigneth*. Whatever turmoil there may be in the kingdoms of the world, whatever opposition to God's law, whatever persecution of God's people, the Lord reigneth, as He has reigned from everlasting. History records many periods of rebellion against God and persecution of His people, but it also shows that they passed away, leaving the reign of God untouched.

I. We have here a description not of God's essential Being but of His clothing, that is, of certain of His attributes. He is apparelled with majesty, He hath girded Himself with strength. Majesty has been defined as the grandeur of exalted rank or character. In God it implies the grandeur of Supreme Being, of absolutely ideal and flawless character—*The Lord, the Lord, a God full of compassion and gracious, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy and truth* (Exod. xxxiv. 6). When we speak of an earthly king being clothed with majesty, we mean with the emblems of majesty which he wears as insignia of his office. But God's attributes are Himself, part of His essential Being: they can never be put off, or descend to another. His Majesty is eternal because He is Himself eternal. Similarly, when we say, He hath girded Himself with strength, we mean that He is Omnipotent. Nothing can resist His power. He can do all things that He wills to do. His Omnipotence is only limited by His goodness; for He cannot will to do that which is evil.

II. *Thy throne is established of old: Thou art from*

everlasting (v. 2). This flows from God's attribute of Immutability. God cannot change. As S. James says, *With Whom can be no variation, neither shadow that is cast by turning* (S. James i. 17). That God is always the same is another source of our confidence in Him. With regard to sin, God's attitude is one of permanent and necessary hostility towards that which is infinitely abhorrent to the Divine Nature of the All-Holy One. With regard to the sinner, His attitude is that of love. When, by penitence, the sin which alienated him from God is removed, the sinner *always* finds mercy, which is the outflow of love. Hence God "desireth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he may turn from his wickedness and live." There is here no change in God, the change is in the sinner.

III. *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and to-day, yea, and for ever* (Heb. xiii. 8). There never was a time when He was not. He is *the Lamb that hath been slain from the foundation of the world* (Rev. xiii. 8 ; cf. 1 S. Peter i. 19, 20). Through the precious blood of Jesus the saints of the Old Covenant found redemption ; for their sacrifices gained their efficacy from pointing to and foreshadowing that of Calvary, which in the foreknowledge of God had been predestinated from the foundation of the world. To us He is the same Jesus Christ, only we are brought into more intimate relation with Him, being made members of His mystical body, and being indwelt by His eternal Spirit, whereby not only our souls but our bodies become the temple of God (cf. 1 Cor. iii. 16 ; vi. 19). And, when our life here is ended, we shall find Him in Heaven still the same, only then we shall, in the Beatific Vision, know Him and the Father, even as we are known.

THE BEATITUDE OF CHASTISEMENT

"Blessed is the man whom Thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest out of Thy Law; That Thou mayest give him rest from the days of adversity, until the pit be digged for the wicked."—PSALM xciv. 12, 13.

A STRANGE beatitude, that of chastisement, some would say. And yet have we not the assurance that *Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth* (Heb. xii. 6). If to be loved of God and recognized as His son is blessed, then surely this beatitude is but an anticipation of the Gospel teaching. Let us consider some of the blessings which flow from chastisement.

I. Chastisement has a great power of revelation; for it reveals to us both God and ourselves. It reveals God in that it drives us to Him for help and guidance, for strength to endure the chastisement, and wisdom to use it rightly. Adversity is one of the greatest opportunities of the soul's life. How sad to let it pass without securing from it a blessing; to have to bear it, but to fail to profit by it! In many, adversity only arouses a rebellious spirit, and thus it proves that they really know neither themselves nor God. If they knew God, they would see in it a mark of His love. If they knew themselves, they would recognize that their sins deserve punishment, and would say with the penitent robber, *And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds* (S. Luke xxiii. 41). Not that adversity can always be traced to any special sin, as effect to cause; but that it sends us back to the remembrance of forgotten sin, like the widow of Zarephath, who said, *O thou man of God, art thou come unto me to bring my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son* (1 Kings xvii. 18)?

II. Adversity is a great instrument of instruction. It is indeed the greatest of all teachers. Prosperity has always proved singularly sterile, whether for the individual or for the race. All the great discoveries, by which mankind has been benefited and enriched, have come through suffering of some sort. Most of the world's benefactors too have been educated in the school of adver-

sity. This is recognized in our text, *Blessed is the man whom Thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest out of Thy Law.* God's law rules in two spheres—nature and grace. The discoveries to which we have referred may be for the most part traced to a deeper and truer understanding of the laws of nature ; while our advances in the spiritual life are the result of our obedience to the laws of grace. But in both, it is through adversity that God teaches us these laws ; for chastisement has immense power in developing the life of the soul.

III. The purpose of chastisement is to lead us to rest—*That thou mayest give him rest from the days of adversity.* The storms and cold of winter are important factors in preparing the ground for the harvest of the summer ; and so are the chastisements of God, together with His teachings, in preparing the soul to enter into that rest which is the recompense of toil, and the reward of victory.

In a measure this rest is attained in this life by those who are disciplined and educated by adversity and affliction. For by the grace of God they have not only learned to bear, but to welcome this as the light affliction which is but for the brief moment of this life. Since they know that it works an eternal weight of glory for those who look not at the things which are seen, the trials and sorrows of life, but at those which are not seen, at their fruits in eternity (cf. 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18). There is a rest for these even here, under the shadow of the great rock in a weary land (cf. Isa. xxxii. 2). There will be a rest for them in the intermediate state, where they shall rest from their labours ; for their works shall follow with them (Rev. xiv. 13). And they shall have the perfect fruition of this rest in the Beatific Vision of Heaven where they rest not day nor night in the joy of praising God (cf. Rev. iv. 8).

THE GREAT INVITATORY PSALM

“O come let us sing unto the Lord: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before His Presence with thanksgiving, let us make a joyful noise unto Him with Psalms. For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods, etc.—PSALM xcv. 1-7.

THIS Psalm is one of a series which from time immemorial preceded the sabbath Psalms on Friday evening, as part of the service for “the reception of the sabbath”; and it is still so used in the Synagogue. In the Christian Church it has from the very earliest formed the introduction to the Psalms of matins in the West. In the Eastern Church a similar invitatory has been adapted from its sixth verse. Hence the common title of this Psalm—“The Invitatory.” In the Hebrew it has no title, in the LXX. the inscription is “A Psalm of David.” It falls into two very distinct parts: I. An invitation to a joyful acknowledgment of God’s mercies (vv. 1-7a). II. A warning against unbelief and disobedience, drawn from the punishment of the Israelites in the wilderness (vv. 7b-11).

I. Confining ourselves to the first part, we may notice that the translation, *Let us come before His Presence with thanksgiving*, is very inadequate. The rendering of the Vulgate and LXX. (*praeoccupemus faciem Ejus* and *προφθάσωμεν*) lays stress rightly on the forwardness, the readiness, the alertness, which the Hebrew denotes. “Let us meet His Face” would be a strict translation. Three reasons are given why worship should be offered with glad hearts:

i. Because of the Supremacy of God as being more glorious than those who are called gods and worshipped by the heathen (v. 3). *A great King above all gods* must be understood in the light of the next Psalm—*all the gods of the people are idols* (Ps. xcvi. 5); not as recognizing them as possessing any real existence.

ii. Because He is the Creator of all things (vv. 4, 5), and therefore the absolute Ruler of the universe, in Whom we live, and move, and have our being (Acts xvii. 25).

iii. Because He is the Shepherd of His chosen people, watching over them with fatherly love, tending them, feeding them, guiding them through life.

II. Our first duty, when we come into God's Presence, is thanksgiving. Before we make known our needs, and supplicate God to supply them, surely we should express our thankfulness and offer our praises for what He has already done for us. So we find in the ancient service-books of the Church this "invitatory" with its earnest and alert call to thanksgiving precedes even the Psalms of praise, and that the collects and prayers come last. How sadly suggestive of the deterioration of the spirit of religion in the Reformation period it is that this order is reversed; and in the "Prayers and Thanksgivings upon Several Occasions" the prayers come first. How is it in our own prayers? Do we gladly go to meet God's Face with thanksgiving before we think of our own wants? Do we seek God's glory before we ask His help? Surely, we are taught this in the first half of the Lord's prayer.

III. *O come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker: for He is our God* (vv. 6, 7). Here we are clearly taught the duty of bodily worship. Three acts are specified—worship, prostration, and kneeling. Posture is not everything, but it is something. We may pray without kneeling, but, if our worship is to be the offering of our whole self, the body as well as the soul and spirit must have its part. The reason of this lowly worship is clearly set forth—*for He is our God*. We can approach Him with joy, because we are His children, but we must also come with reverence. We have a revelation of the character of the heavenly worship, and we know that before the throne the hosts of Heaven fall down in adoring love as they sing their eternal song (cf. Rev. iv. 8-11; v. 8-14).

THE DUTY OF WORSHIP

"Give unto the Lord the glory due unto His Name : Bring an offering, and come into His courts."—PSALM xcvi. 8.

THIS Psalm in the Hebrew has no title, but in the LXX. there is a double inscription : "When the house was built after the captivity and A Song to David (or for David)." The former of these probably correctly indicates that it was composed after the exile, and for the services of the second temple.

I. To give, rather than to get, ought to be the purpose for which we come into God's house. We go there first to worship Him, to give Him the glory due unto His Name ; and it is only after this that we make known to Him in prayer our many needs. There is something dreadfully sordid and selfish in the common idea that we go to church to get good or to get our wants supplied. This cuts at the root of all true worship. For in worship we have fellowship with the heavenly hosts, the saints and angels, who ceaselessly proclaim the holiness, the glory, the honour, and the power of God ; and this, the outpouring of the heart, is quite free from any selfish motive.

II. *Bring an offering, and come into His courts.* The figure here is taken from the Oriental custom which required gifts to be brought by all who desired admission to the presence of a king. But the duty of bringing offerings to God at stated times was enjoined by God Himself in the Law—*Thou shalt not appear before the Lord empty: every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord thy God which He hath given thee* (Deut. xvi. 16 ; cf. also Exod. xxiii. 15 ; xxxiv 20). The word translate "offering" is "minchah," the unbloody sacrifice of fine flour which was offered as a peace-offering and for thanksgiving (Lev. ii ; vii. 11-14). It therefore represents to us the unbloody sacrifice of the Eucharist, which as the pleading of the death of Christ (1 Cor. xi. 26), is our peace-offering and thank-offering. It is in union with this that we offer ourselves, our souls and bodies, all that we are and all that

we have, "to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice" unto God.

III. It is only when we have first given ourselves to God that we can bring Him, as an acceptable offering, something of the gifts that he has so abundantly bestowed upon us, saying with David, *All things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee* (1 Chron. xxix. 14). All things that we have come from God and belong to God, and God has commanded us to give back a part to Him in recognition of His right to all. He said to the Israelites keeping their feasts, *None shall appear before the Lord empty*. And by the prophet Malachi God traces the troubles and adversities of the Israelites to their neglect of this duty. *Will a man rob God? yet ye rob Me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed Thee? In tithes and offerings* (Mal. iii. 8). We find the same duty enjoined by S. Paul (cf. 1 Cor. xvi. 2; 2 Cor. ix. 1-8).

If God be our God, His interests will be our interests, and therefore we shall gladly give of our means and of our strength to carry on His work. How much we owe to Him, and to His Church, for all the blessings, material and spiritual, of our life! How thankful then we should be for opportunities of expressing our gratitude and of paying a small portion of our great debt!

THE NEW SONG OF SALVATION

"O sing unto the Lord a new song; for He hath done marvellous things: His right hand, and His holy arm hath wrought salvation for Him."—PSALM xcvi. 1.

It has been said that this Psalm is little more than an echo of Ps. xcvi., yet it differs from that in that it points to a definite moment in the dealings of God with man, and in His mercy and truth to the House of Israel, when the victory so often promised, and the salvation so long expected, shall have been accomplished. This is not only a Messianic Psalm, it is *the* Psalm which tells of Christ's finished work, and of the joy of Israel, of the Gentiles, and even of inanimate creation in the marvellous things which the Lord hath wrought. Apparently, for this reason it has been selected as the alternative canticle for the Magnificat.

I. *O sing unto the Lord a new song; for He hath done marvellous things.* We sang a new song before (Ps. xcvi.) because the Lord was coming, but now we sing it because He has come, and has redeemed mankind. Marvellous things indeed He did in His life, in His death, in His resurrection, and in His ascension. Nor did the marvels stop there. For by the outpouring of the Holy Ghost upon His Church at Pentecost, she too has been able to do marvellous things in converting the world to Christ, and, by the operation of the Holy Ghost, in regenerating human nature. Two marvels are specially pointed to—*He hath remembered His mercy and His faithfulness toward the house of Israel: and All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.* Every promise made to Abraham and his descendants, to David and to his Son, every word of the Lord spoken by His prophets has been remembered and fulfilled. And more, *all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.* Thus is redeemed the promise to Abraham—*In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed* (Gen. xii. 3).

II. In his new song the Psalmist calls not only upon his fellow-men, wherever they may be throughout the world, but invites all creation to join in the hymn of praise

(vv. 7, 8). Man was given dominion over all the lower creatures (cf. Gen. i. 28), not only that they might minister to his needs, but that he might use them for God's glory. How sad it is to realize that in the misuse of our dominion we often make the creatures minister as slaves to our sins. We must keep ourselves detached from them in order that we may offer them to God in the fulfilment of their true destiny ; for creatures are frequently given us that by their non-use, by their surrender, we may offer them in sacrifice to God, using them as the instruments of our sacrifice.

III. We lift them into a higher sphere when we use the creatures not only as our servants but as our fellow-worshippers. S. Paul tells us that *the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God* (cf. Rom. viii. 19-25).

As the creatures have fellowship with us in the mystery of suffering here, and, in some mysterious manner, are to be partakers with us in the glory of redemption hereafter, so, in a sense, they now share with us in the fellowship of worship. The material world cannot of itself render worship (except in the accomplishment of the purposes for which it was directly created), but it can and does aid in his acts of praise the man whose soul is filled with the spirit of worship. For by its voices it stimulates his praise. The birds by their song, the flowers by their beauty, the mountains by their grandeur, the sea in its power, each by awakening some sacred emotion in the soul helps man in his service, and together, as a vast choir, they accompany his service of praise.

FORGIVENESS YET PUNISHMENT

"Thou answeredst them, O Lord our God: Thou wast a God that forgavest them, though Thou tookest vengeance of their doings."—PSALM xcix. 8.

THIS is the last of the royal Psalms, which celebrate the coming of Jehovah as King. On this account they are sometimes called "The second advent Psalms." In the last half of the Psalm (vv. 6-8), the subject is God's answer to prayer, especially to intercession, but with the qualification that forgiveness, as the fruit of intercession, is compatible with the exaction of punishment.

I. *Moses and Aaron among His priests, and Samuel among them that call upon His Name; they called upon the Lord, and He answered them* (6). These three were special examples of the power of intercession with God on behalf of the Israelites (cf. Exod. xxxii. 30; Numb. xiv. 13; xxi. 7; xvi. 46-48). *And He answered them*, that is, He heard their prayer and granted it. S. Augustine takes verse 8 as referring to these three, pointing out that while God forgave them their sins, Moses his anger at the rock, Aaron for making the golden calf, and Samuel for repeating the sin of Eli (which he had himself denounced) by permitting the misconduct of his sons (cf. Numb. xx. 12; Exod. xxxii. 24; 1 Sam. viii. 3), yet in each case He exacted punishment—Moses and Aaron by exclusion from Canaan. Samuel by his deposition from his rank as judge when Saul became king. The Greek Fathers and most modern commentators however, refer verse 8 to the whole people of Israel, who were forgiven, but punished by the fire and the plague for their rebellion in the wilderness; and by the tyranny of Saul for their rejection of the theocracy, when they demanded a king.

II. The great lesson here is that forgiveness is consistent with vengeance or punishment for sin, and that the exaction of the penalty is part of that love which forgives. We have seen this in the cases of Moses, Aaron, and Samuel, and we may add that of David, the man after God's own heart, who was twice forgiven for grievous sins, in the matter

of Uriah and in the numbering of the people, but who was, on each occasion, most severely punished (cf. 2 Sam. xii. 10-14; xxiv. 10-14). All these were forgiven. But what does forgiveness mean? Surely, not necessarily the remission of the punishment; for many escape punishment in this life *who are not forgiven*. Forgiveness means restoration of the former relationship. A father forgives his child, takes him back to his heart, but for that child's moral good inflicts punishment. Our heavenly Father in forgiving us takes us back to His heart. This is the all-important thing; and without it no remission of penalty could ever bring peace and joy to our souls. It is God's love for us that leaves us to bear the consequences of our sin in this life, that allows those consequences to dog our footsteps and darken our life; for it is by penance humbly borne that the wounds of our soul are gradually healed, and its lost powers restored.

III. The remedial effects of the endurance of punishment.

i. It keeps us humble and watchful—My sin is ever before me, said David. If we are assured of God's forgiveness, we shall not wish to forget our sin, for its remembrance serves to keep ever before us the greatness of God's goodness and love, and to awaken in us an abiding and increasing love of God. The remembrance of sin ought to be the fuel of our love causing the flame of love to burn more brightly in the soul.

ii. Then too it should deepen our hatred of sin, and make us more compassionate to others who are tempted, and yield.

iii. And it should develop in us strength in the very parts of our character in which we have shown ourselves weak.

THE RENEWAL OF YOUTH

"Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things ; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle."—PSALM ciii. 5.

THE date and authorship of this Psalm is most uncertain. In the Hebrew title it is assigned to David. Many, however, consider it exilic, or even post-exilic. There is really no evidence to enable us to form a decided opinion. The Psalm falls into three parts. I. An introduction in which the Psalmist strives to stir up within himself a spirit of gratitude by the remembrance of the many personal mercies vouchsafed to him (vv. 1-5). II. Then he passes to a record of blessings bestowed upon the nation as the grounds of hope amid the darkness of human sin and transitoriness. III. He concludes with an invocation of the angels, of all God's ministering creatures, and finally of his own soul, calling on all to bless God for His many mercies.

I. *So that thy youth is renewed like the eagle.* The renewal of youth. What does this mean ? In what sense is it true ? Certainly not in a physical sense. For there is no law more universal or more absolute than that of the steady approach of old age with the corresponding failure of strength. This may be put off for a few years by some of unusual strength, but the general experience of life is well summed up by the Psalmist, *We bring our years to an end as a tale that is told. The days of our years are three score years and ten, or even by reason of strength four score years ; Yet is their pride but labour and sorrow ; for it is soon gone, and we fly away* (Ps. xc. 10). The similitude of the eagle is suggested because, after moulting, each year he puts on a new coat of feathers, and so appears to renew his youth ; but it is only in appearance.

II. There is, however, a sense in which we do renew our youth ; for in the spiritual sphere we ought to grow more vigorous as our bodily strength decays, and the end of life approaches. It is of this spiritual growth that Isaiah speaks, when he says, *They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength ; they shall mount up with wings as*

eagles (Isa. xl. 31). With wings *as* eagles ; but not with eagles' wings ; rather with the wings of The Dove, the Holy Ghost, the wings for which David longed, when he said, *Oh that I had wings like a dove ! Then would I fly away and be at rest* (Ps. lv. 6). We can spread these wings in prayer and meditation, and flee away from this world of trouble to our heavenly home, and there in the contemplation of the good things that God has prepared for them that love Him find our rest. It is in such flights of the soul to the throne of grace that we renew our strength—*They go from strength to strength, every one of them appeareth before God in Zion* (Ps. lxxxiv. 7).

III. *Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things.* This is the secret of our spiritual growth, that God not only feeds us but satisfies us with the good things of His providing. We need earthly food that we may grow in stature, and develop in mind and body. And we need heavenly food, which God alone can give us, that we may grow in heavenly wisdom, in the knowledge and love of God. This food we may obtain chiefly in two ways :—

i. By meditation on the Word of God. For, as our Lord said, *Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God* (S. Matt. iv. 4).

ii. By feeding upon the body and blood of Jesus Christ, given us in Holy Communion. For Christ has said, *He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood hath eternal life ; and I will raise him up at the last day* (S. John vi. 54). As we pray, *Give us this day our daily bread*, let us ask especially for that bread that comes from our Father's hand, the bread of life, given to us in the Word of God and in the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist.

THE PITY OF GOD

"Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him. For he knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust."—PSALM ciii. 13, 14.

I. PITY is essentially a virtue of revealed religion. It is unknown in heathen mythology. The gods of the Greeks and Romans manifested most of the passions and sins of men, and but few of the moral virtues. In nature-worship too it was entirely absent; the chief idea being the propitiation of malignant deities, frequently by cruel sacrifices, e.g., to Moloch. Moreover, nature itself knows nothing of pity. She is red in claw and limb, one species preying upon another. Even man, in his uncivilized state, follows the example of nature in being pitiless to his foe. It is only when we come to revealed religion that we find pity as an attribute of God, and as a virtue strictly enjoined on man. In the Mosaic dispensation God reveals Himself as *The Lord, the Lord, a God full of compassion and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy and truth* (Exod. xxxiv. 6).

II. In man we find pity manifested first and chiefly in the home, and in the relation of parents and young children; and it is their very helplessness that appeals most to the father and mother. So we find, in this passage, man's helplessness given as the motive of God's pity—*For He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust.* And it is in the relation of father to child that God exercises His pity. While the pity of both father and mother is awakened by the same parental affection, it generally differs in its manifestation, the pity of the father being usually more tempered with justice and firmness than that of the mother. The father does not, as a rule, hesitate to inflict punishment, even though it causes pain; but it is inflicted, and for the child's good. We may notice, too, that the love of parents long precedes the reciprocal love of the child. They provide for it from the moment of birth with anxious care, they bear with its childish faults with loving patience, and they strive to train it in the paths of duty. It is, however, not till the child has been the object

of their watchful love for several years that it begins to manifest an intelligent love for its father and mother. So it is with God's love for us. *I have loved thee with an everlasting love* (Jer. xxxi. 3). This was spoken of the nation of Israel, but it is true of each individual child of God. From all eternity, in His purpose to create me, I was an object of God's love. Throughout my life that love for me has never wavered or waned. It has been manifested in the Providence which has watched over me; in the gifts of nature and of grace bestowed on me, and never has it been more tenderly exercised than in God's patience with me in my wilfulness and sin.

III. *He knoweth our frame*, etc. He knows our weakness, inherited tendencies which lead us into sin, temptations which our environment brings with it, and from which we cannot escape. Our body is weak against the mighty forces of nature, our minds weak from ignorance—often their greatest strength is the recognition of this ignorance, our will is weak against the many seductions of the world, the flesh, and the devil. God knows this, and, as an earthly father bears patiently with the faults of his children, though striving to eradicate them by judicious punishment, so God, though in a far wiser and more loving way, pities His children, and helps their infirmities. How gladly then should we accept God's ordering of our lives, trusting our heavenly Father to send us what is best for us in sickness and in health, in adversity and in prosperity; only praying for grace and guidance to use rightly whatever God in His wisdom and love may send us.

THE BLESSINGS OF DARKNESS

"Thou makest darkness, and it is night; wherein all the beasts of the forest do creep forth."—PSALM CIV. 20.

MUCH has been written about the blessings of light, about the marvels it reveals, the beauties of colour and of form, about the necessity of light for man's life and work, and for the knowledge of the world around him. Little, however is said of the blessings of darkness, or of its own special purpose and revelation. Yet they too are very great. Let us consider some of them.

I. The first, and most obvious blessing of darkness is that it brings with it regular and frequent opportunities of that rest from labour which is so necessary for the preservation of health and strength. Without the daily recurrence of night many probably would neglect to take adequate repose. Darkness is for the majority of the creatures a call to rest, though for others a call to activity; for it is in the darkness that the beasts of the forest creep forth, and not only the beasts but the night birds, and a large section of insect life. Those who live in England have little idea of the nightly activity of the great kingdom of the "insecta." In countries of more southerly latitude the coming of darkness brings with it a cheerful chorus of insect voices which enliven the night, as the glow-worms and fireflies enlighten it. Few realize how large a part of our lives is spent in sleep, for most of us probably one-third; and the regularity with which the birds go to roost as the sun goes down is a reminder that rest is necessary for the well-being of both animal and vegetable life, and especially that it is requisite for man after the labours of the day. Rest is essential for the recruiting of our weary bodies, and still more necessary for the refreshment of the mind, which under the pressure of modern conditions needs relaxation more now than at any period in human history. That *man goeth forth unto his labour until the evening*, and then rests is a law of nature, recognized by God in revelation, and enforced by the regular succession of night and day.

II. Another blessing of darkness is the revelation it

brings. If light makes manifest to us the wonders of the world in which we live, darkness reveals to us the even greater marvels of the starry heavens. Without the night we should have thought this little earth the sole product of God's creation, but our planet is only one of many systems, and there are countless other worlds, though, so far as we know, uninhabited.

III. The beneficent effects of darkness in the realm of physical life may be traced also in that of the spiritual world, where the darkness of adversity, suffering, and sorrow, the night of the soul, brings to man many spiritual blessings. It provides a testing of the real character, revealing to us our weak points, and the special tendencies towards evil inherent in each of us. It enables us to estimate at their true value the protestations of love and of devotion to God made in the words of the offices of the Church and in our own private prayers. How many protestations of resignation to the will of God, how many noble sentiments and exalted feelings when brought to the test by the pressure of adversity are found to be utterly worthless. The most important factor in the development of the spiritual life is a clear knowledge of our true self, of the faults to be eradicated, of the besetting sins to be struggled against, and of the weak points in our character which need to be strengthened. And the trials of mind, body, and estate are the means by which this knowledge is brought home to us. But this is not all. It is in the bearing of suffering and adversity that we learn most effectively God's love and goodness towards us. Darkness is a revelation of self and of God.

THE BLESSING OF WORK

"The sun ariseth. . . . Man goeth forth unto his work and to his labour until the evening."—PSALM CIV. 22, 23.

As the shadows of the night call man to needed rest, so does the rising sun summon him to his day's work. Both tell of God's care in ordering man's life. We have considered the beneficent effect of rest, let us now turn our thoughts to some of the blessings of work. The decree, *In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread*, was the penance of sin, but, like all penances given by God, it was imposed in love, and for our good ; for it was distinctly remedial, as all good penances should be.

I. Behind the law of labour is the need impressed on man at his creation, and therefore before his fall, the need of food. When God gave to man the gift of life, that gift was not absolute, but conditioned by the use of food. Man must eat that he may live ; and the cravings of hunger are intended to impel him to that work which is so large a factor in the development of character in the individual and in the progress of the race. There are some parts of the world where, on account of climatic and other conditions, the need of labour for the support of life is greatly reduced. The wants of man there are but few, and are largely supplied by the spontaneous productions of the earth, which involve a minimum amount of work to gather in. We find, however, that this is not for man's good. It produces a race of men, enervated and without ambition, who are exposed to many vices, and are for the most part of low moral and intellectual character. From the study of these races we learn that work is essential alike to man's development and to his happiness.

II. Hunger of body and mind is the great stimulus to human effort and success, and is the chief incentive to the labour upon which man's evolution depends. Moreover, labour teaches man his dependence upon others, and is thus a great factor in the development of social life ; for as man advances in civilization he learns that he cannot supply all his own wants, but that for many things necessary to his

well-being he must depend upon the work of others. Out of this discovery has come the development of man as a social being. We find too that man's intellectual growth, as well as his material prosperity, is bound up with mutual co-operation, and hence that labour is as essential to national as to individual well-being.

III. *Man goeth forth unto his work.* In the constitution of a well-ordered State, each individual should be expected to make a definite contribution to the welfare of the whole body of citizens ; and an idler is not only a useless member, but is generally injurious to the commonwealth. In the parable of The Talents, the servant who neglected to improve the opportunity given him for work is called, by our Lord, a wicked servant, and, because *useless* (*ἀχρεῖον*), is cast into the outer darkness (S. Matt. xxv. 30). We are, however, not only citizens of an earthly State, but members of Christ's body the Church and citizens of the kingdom of heaven. And to each of us Christ has given a special work, and grace to accomplish it (cf. S. Mark xiii. 34 ; Eph. iv. 7). How happy should we be as each day's rising sun calls us to our work for Christ and for our fellow-man ! With what diligence and delight should we go forth to labour in the building up of God's kingdom on earth, which (as in the building of Solomon's temple 1 Kings vi. 7) is the preparation of the stones of the New Jerusalem for their place in the walls of the Holy City (cf. Rev. xxi. 19). We end our great Psalm of penitence with the prayer, *O be favourable and gracious unto Sion* (the Church militant), *build Thou the walls of Jerusalem* (the Church triumphant !) In that work of building we have each day our part to do. This is the thought that makes our labour so joyous now, that we look for the reward of our work in the welcome of our Lord, *Well done, good and faithful servant . . . enter thou into the joy of thy Lord* (S. Matt. xxv. 21, 27).

GOD'S CARE FOR THE FEW

"When they were but a few men in number; yea, very few, and sojourners in it."—PSALM CV. 12-15.

I. As we read the story of the great enterprises and movements which have left a lasting mark upon the history of the world, we cannot but be struck with one common feature in them—their small beginnings. This was the special character of the great religious movement to which, under God's guidance, we owe the blessings which culminated in Christianity. If we begin with Abraham, we see in him one family set apart to regenerate the world. Of them we may say, *They were but a few men in number; yea, very few, and sojourners in it* (i.e., foreigners in Canaan). By God's Providence *they went about from nation to nation, from one kingdom to another people. He suffered no man to do them wrong; Yea, He reprov'd kings for their sakes, saying, Touch not Mine anointed ones and do My prophets no harm* (vv. 12-15). Since childhood we have read again and again their history, and, from its intense interest and importance, have failed to grasp the extreme smallness of its field of activity. Compared with the vast empires of Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon, with which they were contemporary, the Israelites were but an insignificant handful of people, occupying a tiny corner of the world about the size of Wales. And yet, of all people, they have been the greatest benefactors of the human race. Few in number, God was with them. He guided them, chastening them for their sins, but never forsaking them, till their mission was accomplished, and the true Israelites became the nucleus of the world-religion of Jesus Christ.

II. We find precisely the same conditions in the beginning of the Christian Church. A handful of earnest men who, within a period of twenty years from their starting point at Pentecost, were said to "have turned the world upside down" (Acts xvii. 6). Our Lord has told us that *the kingdom of heaven is like unto a grain of mustard seed . . . less than all seeds; but when it is grown, it . . . becometh a tree* (S. Matt. xiii. 31, 32). How often we are dis-

couraged by the smallness of the number of earnest Christians, how greatly we are elated when we see crowds, drawn by some eloquent preacher or attracted to some popular scheme of Church work. And yet experience tells us that from the former much may be expected, from the latter very little.

III. *There is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few* (1 Sam. xiv. 6 ; cf. 2 Chron. xiv. 11 ; 1 Cor. i. 27, 28). Yet the history of the Christian Church shows that almost always God has chosen rather to save by few. Some instances of this : *The foundation of the Church—the Apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the chief corner stone* (Ephes. ii. 20). The conversion of the Gentiles—SS. Paul and Barnabas starting on the first definite mission to the heathen (Acts xiii., xiv.). The religious revival in the thirteenth century—SS. Francis and Dominic. And these were examples of many such revivals from those times to our own. The story of Christian missions from the first Jesuit missions under S. Francis Xavier to the many enterprises for the conversion of heathen all over the world is for the most part the record at the first of individual effort and sacrifice, a small body of men, few in number, were everywhere the pioneers. These are all exemplifications of the law that quality not quantity is the condition of success in God's work. A few really consecrated Christians can accomplish what crowds can never effect. The realization of our own weakness, which is overwhelmingly forced upon us when we are but few, leads us to put all our trust in God, and wins for us the manifestation of His Almighty power. When human weakness is most evident Divine grace is most powerful.

THE VALUE OF DISCIPLINE

"He sent a man before them ; Joseph was sold for a servant : His feet they hurt with fetters ; His soul entered into the iron."—PSALM CV. 17, 18.

IN the last meditation we were reminded of God's use of "the few" for the accomplishment of His highest purposes. In this we may carry on the thought, and learn how God disciplines those whom He so uses. God's instruments need to be sharpened by adversity that they may be exceedingly effective in His hands. We have in Joseph an example of this law. Joseph was not only a type of Christ, but the most perfect type of Him in the O.T., both in the many points of likeness in his life to that of our Lord, and in the fact that he is the only type of Christ of whom no fault is recorded.

I. The early life of Joseph. The beloved son of his father, he receives special marks of his affection, which excite the jealousy of his brethren, and lead to the great trials by which he is disciplined. Jacob's favouritism too rendered him less prepared for adversity, and therefore more susceptible to it. How great it was ! the treachery and inhumanity of his brethren, the humiliation of slavery after his position as the favourite son of a great sheik. Then by his merit he wins his way to comparative prosperity as the trusted steward of a rich man. All is at his disposal except that which by temperament and training he had come to long for—sympathy and affection. Only one in that household could offer him that. His master was too much above him ; his fellow slaves too far below him. But Potiphar's wife, attracted by his beauty and goodness, offers it, at first perhaps innocently, but later she becomes his temptress. This leads to a testing of Joseph. Which shall he choose ? power, honour and prosperity with sin ; or a prison with the consciousness of integrity ? In the discipline of the prison Joseph is again put to the proof, and wins the respect and trust of all. Then raised to the right hand of Pharaoh he has to meet another trial, that of prosperity. How shall he use his power and wealth ?

But he has learned self-mastery, discipline has done its work, and he is ready to be God's instrument in a great crisis in the history of God's people. He uses his opportunity unselfishly, in relieving the suffering caused by the famine, and after a final testing in his behaviour to his cruel brethren, in which he displays magnificent generosity and deep affection, he has his reward in the restoration of his aged father whom he so devotedly loved. How great a joy it must have been to him to have been the instrument of saving that father's life from the famine.

II. Joseph's disciplinary training was a prophetic foreshadowing of the education of the Jewish nation to become God's instrument in the redemption of mankind. Their checkered history, their bitter trials and wonderful deliverances, were all a part of the development of that peculiar character which, both as a race and as individuals, has made them unique among the nations of the world. From this people, disciplined by centuries of adversity, was to spring the Redeemer, Whose life in so many particulars was foreshadowed in that of Joseph.

III. God has a work for each of us to do, and we must welcome the trials and adversities of life as the disciplinary preparation for that work. When, in the Lord's prayer, we say, *Thy will be done*, we ought to mean both in the passive endurance of trial and suffering and in the active accomplishment of God's designs for us. Let us always remember that there is a close relation between the two, and that in adversity we are being fitted for the glorious privilege of co-operating in the fulfilment of God's purposes.

THE SIN OF DISCONTENT

"But (they) lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert. And He gave them their request; and sent leanness into their soul."—PSALM CVI. 14, 15.

I. S. PAUL, writing of the events which befell the Israelites in the wilderness, tells us that these things were our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted (1 Cor. x. 6). He is referring especially to their murmuring at Rephidim (Exod. xvii. 1-7), but his words seem to be a reminiscence of the verse we are considering. The reminder, that these things *were written for our admonition*, gives to it a peculiar interest and claim upon our attention. The incident is recorded in Numb. xi. Dissatisfied with the manna given them by God, and longing inordinately for the richer and more luxurious victuals of Egypt, the mixed multitude (Israelites and camp-followers) fell to lusting after flesh food, and murmured against Moses and God. In punishment God sent them quails in abundance, enough not only for a few days but for a whole month. In their greediness they gathered them in great quantities, and spread them abroad all around the camp. But, while gorging themselves with the rich food, *the anger of the Lord was kindled against the people, and the Lord smote the people with a very great plague*. So many died that the place was called "the Graves of Lust" (vv. 31-33).

II. What admonition has this for us? It tells us that discontent with the circumstances in which God's Providence has placed us is sin, and it warns us against the danger of inordinate desire for greater riches and luxury. The Israelites were not suffering from hunger, the provision of manna was sufficient to keep them in health and strength, and was a convenient food for the exigencies of constant movement in the wilderness. In a hot climate, such as they were in, flesh food was unnecessary, and in any great abundance undesirable. The people therefore were not lusting for the necessities of life, but for its luxuries, for *the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic of Egypt*;

all good things in their place, but quite out of the reach of people passing through a desert. If our circumstances in life are straitened, there is no reason why we should not endeavour by legitimate means to improve them ; but the spirit of discontent, the inordinate lusting for what God has not given us is altogether wrong, in that it destroys our peace of mind, fosters the spirit of covetousness, and frequently impels us to the use of unlawful expedients to obtain our desires.

III. *He gave them their request ; and sent leanness into their soul.* God sometimes punishes us by permitting us to have our own way, but at the same time by letting us experience the cost of our evil choice. We have here an example of this. They lusted exceedingly for flesh food and a more generous diet. They obtained it ; but instead of the improvement in their condition they expected, that which should have brought them fatness resulted only in greater leanness. In a word, the diet of their choice disagreed with them, and its consequence was a plague from which many died. We have another most striking instance in the story of Balaam, who from lust of riches was unwilling to accept God's refusal to allow him to go to Balak, to curse his enemies. He tried to obtain a reversal of this decision, when Balak's messengers brought him greater bribes. He was permitted to go his own way, and the result was his destruction ; for Balaam died fighting against the very people whom in God's Name he had blessed. There have been at all times many following *the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the hire of wrong-doing ; but he was rebuked for his own transgression : a dumb ass spake with man's voice and stayed the madness of the prophet* (2 S. Pet. ii. 15, 16).

THE UNWEARIED COMPASSION OF GOD

"Many times did He deliver them, but they were rebellious in their counsel, and were brought low in their iniquity. Nevertheless He regarded their distress, when He heard their cry: and He remembered for them His covenant."—PSALM cvi. 43-45.

SURELY these words sum up the history of God's dealings with His chosen people from their Exodus from Egypt to their captivity in Babylon. Many times indeed did God deliver them from miseries and oppressions which were the direct outcome of their unfaithfulness to their covenant with God. Their repentance, however, lasted but a short time, and then they returned to their sins of idolatry and rebellion against God's law, until disasters which these brought them drove them again to seek God. Their history was one long record of their own iniquities and God's long-suffering mercy.

I. The period when this was most manifest was that which followed their establishment in Canaan after their conquest of the land. God had fulfilled all His promises. He had brought them out from the bitter captivity of Egypt by miracles and wonders, He had led them through the wilderness, and sustained them there for forty years, and had given them victory over all their foes. Then, immediately, they rebelled against Him, and after the death of Joshua allowed the Canaanites to dwell among them for the sake of the services they exacted (Judg. i. 28). This was in direct violation of God's command (c. ii. 1,2), and as a result they were speedily corrupted in their morals and seduced into idolatry by them. God withdrew His favour, and they quickly sank into a state of subjection to the Canaanites, whom by His help they had so easily conquered. Even then God had pity on them, and raised up judges who delivered them again and again. *But it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they turned back, and dealt more corruptly than their fathers* (Judg. ii. 19).

II. We wonder, as we read of their miseries, that they did not learn from their misfortunes to serve God more

faithfully. But does the history of Christianity show much greater stability? Three centuries of persecution, when the flame of love and devotion burned most brightly, were followed by a period of great prosperity, when the world crowded into the Church, and brought with it the corruptions of heathen society, and the heresies of Oriental dualism, besides those which attacked the doctrine of the Incarnation. The age of heresies was succeeded by an alternation of long periods of spiritual decadence and of intense religious revival. There were, during this period, lapses into worldliness and irreligion, from which God delivered his people by raising up among them great saints, endowed with fiery eloquence and manifesting in a supreme degree the virtues of humility and holiness. These men won back to God the hearts of those who listened to their message. But, alas, a season of gradual declension from religious earnestness always ensued.

III. How generally too this has been the sad story of individual experience ; periods of fervour alternating with seasons of deadness and worldliness. And yet through all God's love is unwearied. The Holy Spirit pleads with us, and strives to guide us back to God. Let me ask myself how it has been with me in my spiritual life. How do I now stand in my relation to God? What will be my future if I remain lukewarm and indifferent? How often in the Church's service have I heard those words, "To-day if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts . . . as in the day of temptation in the wilderness"?

THANKSGIVING FOR DELIVERANCE FROM PERIL

*"They wandered in the wilderness in a desert way; they found no city of habitation. Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them. Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and He delivered them out of their distresses, etc.—*PSALM cvii. 4-9.

MANY, on account of certain points of similarity, think Psalms cvi. and cvii. are by the same author. For not only are the opening words identical, but that which is the subject of prayer in the former becomes the subject of thanksgiving in the latter. The Psalmist prays, in cvi. 47, that God would gather Israel from among the nations; and, in cvii. 1-3, exhorts Israel to give thanks to Him Who has gathered them out of the lands, from the east, etc. The Psalms, however, differ in that this Psalm, unlike the other, is not historical, but is a description of various incidents of human life. It tells of four perils from which the goodness of God delivers men; and it calls upon all who have experienced His care and protection gratefully to acknowledge it. Its great theme is that God hears the prayers of those who call upon Him, and that such answers to their petitions should always be acknowledged with heartfelt thanksgiving.

I. The first peril, that of those who have lost their way, probably refers to a not unusual experience among the caravans of exiles crossing the sandy desert on their return to their own land. *They found no city of habitation.* No particular city is here meant, but merely an inhabited city as opposed to the wilds of the desert. Hunger and thirst overtook them, and the pressure of great need drove them to prayer. God heard their cry; and led them by a straight way (as opposed to the wanderings of those who have lost their path) to an inhabited place, where they could obtain the food and water they so greatly needed.

II. While this refers directly to a frequent peril of the returning caravans, is it not also a picture of a soul that has lost its way in the wilderness of the world? How many

wanderers from the way there are ! The man who has gone astray in the wilderness can find neither home nor food nor rest. The first pangs that assail him are those of hunger and thirst : that hunger and thirst of the soul which the world can never satisfy. It can offer food for the body, food for the passions, food for the mind. But while these may for a while distract the attention of the man from the famishing condition of his soul, they can never supply the cravings of his spiritual nature, and they can never satisfy the longings of a heart which was made for God, and is restless until it rests in Him.

III. At last, the lost and fainting condition of the soul is realized, and the cry goes up to God for guidance and food. The prayer is heard ; and the soul is led by a straight way to the city of God on earth, where the inhabitants gladly welcome the wanderer, and minister to his needs. First, his hunger and thirst are assuaged by the bread of life and the cup of salvation ; for Christ in His sacrament feeds and refreshes the soul of the returned penitent with His own body and blood, of which He said, *My flesh is meat indeed, and My blood is drink indeed* (S. John vi. 55). Then, in the strength of that meat (cf. 1 Kings xix. 8), and with Jesus as his guide, he makes his pilgrimage to the Mount of God, the city of the saints. *For we have not here an abiding city, but we seek after the city which is to come* (Heb. xiii. 14). But we *have* here Jesus Who is the Way, and the Truth, and the Life. In Him we are led by a straight path to our dear native land in Heaven.

GOD IS OUR REFUGE IN TIME OF TROUBLE

“ Such as sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, being bound in affliction and iron ; because they rebelled against the words of God, etc.—PSALM cvii. 10-21.

I. The second peril of the soul, here described, is that of captivity to sin. Worse than the wanderer who has strayed from God is the case of the sinner who is tied and bound with the chain of sin, which he has forged for himself by long indulgence in habits of mortal sin. His misery is well pictured as of one sitting in darkness and the shadow of death, being bound in affliction and iron. So was Samson bound at Gaza, where he did grind in the prison-house (cf. Judg. xvi. 21). It is therefore not only the weak, but the strong also who become the captives of sin. *Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and He saved them out of their distresses. He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and brake their bands in sunder* (vv. 13, 14). God's ear is ever open to the cry of the penitent, *and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin* (1 S. John i. 7). One drop of the precious blood, and the strongest fetters of sin are shattered.

II. The third peril of the soul, brought before us in this Psalm, is that of a man stricken with mortal disease (cf. vv. 17-21). It is because of his transgressions and iniquity that the affliction is sent. There is the gradual loss of appetite, and loss of strength, until at last he draws near to the gates of death. Then, when all earthly aid has failed, the sinner cries to God. It is frequently in God's mercy and love that sickness is sent, to bring to remembrance the sin (cf. 1 Kings xvii. 18), which in time of health we so easily forget. Alone in the sick chamber, face to face with death, our sins stand out clearly before us in all their guilt. Well for us then, if we do indeed cry unto the Lord in our trouble, not merely that He may deliver us from the perils of death, but that He may cleanse us from the guilt of sin, and take us back to His favour and love.

III. The last peril of the soul to which the Psalmist

refers is that of the storm-tossed mariner, with but a plank between him and the raging billows. Here we have a picture of a soul, driven before the storm of trial or adversity which so frequently bursts upon us unexpectedly in our voyage through life. Just as at sea a ship may be sailing before a fair wind, and the voyage may seem propitious, when, all of a sudden, the glass falls, the wind changes, and in a few hours the ship is staggering in the path of a hurricane ; so our lives may be proceeding in their accustomed course, when some great calamity befalls us, and we find ourselves struggling against a storm of overwhelming trials, and our *soul melteth away because of trouble*. So it was with the Apostles in their little boat on the lake, when they aroused their Lord with the cry, *Master, carest Thou not that we perish* (S. Mark iv. 38). But at His word the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. Apart from Christ, when the storms of trial and temptation break upon us we are in fearful danger ; but with Jesus in the boat with us we are always safe. We have but to cry, Lord, save us, and He will hear.

We must not, however, forget the great refrain that occurs four times in the Psalm, *Oh that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men !* (vv. 8, 15, 21, 31). In the hour of deliverance our great thought must be not of the danger we have escaped, but of the goodness of God in hearing our prayer, and coming to our aid ; and of praise and thanksgiving to Him for His mercy. *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble* (Ps. xlv. 1).

CHRIST OUR INTERCESSOR

"Be Thou exalted, O God, above the heavens : and Thy glory above all the earth. That Thy beloved may be delivered, Save with Thy right hand, and answer me."—PSALM cviii. 5, 6.

THIS Psalm simply consists of portions of two other Psalms. The first half of it (vv. 1-5) being taken from Ps. lvii. 7-11 ; and the latter part (vv. 6-13) from Ps. lx. 5-12. This composite Psalm has been assigned in its present form by some to the Captivity. We are told that, sitting by the waters of Babylon, the captives hung their harps upon the willows ; and could not be persuaded by their conquerors to sing "the songs of Zion" in a strange land (cf. cxxxvii. 1-4). But, when the Lord had turned again their captivity (cf. Ps. cxxvi), the psaltery and harp of former generations awoke (v. 2) ; and the old songs revived upon their lips. These old hymns, however, were fraught with fresh beauty and meaning, as expressions of their thankfulness for God's mercy to themselves in restoring to them their native land.

I. These verses are not only a prayer for the glorification of Christ, but for the fruit of that glorification in the deliverance of His beloved, who are in trial and affliction on earth. And what is this fruit but Christ's exercise of His regal power on our behalf in Heaven, where *He ever liveth to make intercession for us* (Heb. vii. 25)? For there, *we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous : and He is the Propitiation for our sins* (1 S. John ii. 1,2). This intercession covers the whole mediatorial work of the ascended Christ with the Father on behalf of those who are His beloved, His own redeemed ones. The word (ἐντυγχάνειν) is wider in its meaning than "pleading," and includes occupation in the general interests of the person for whom intercession is made. S. Paul's reference to this, as the supreme work of our Lord, is strikingly suggestive—*It is Christ Jesus that died, yea rather, that was raised from the dead, Who is at the right hand of God, Who also maketh intercession for us* (Rom.

viii. 34). The great works of Christ—His death, His resurrection, His Ascension find their abiding issue in His work of intercession for us.

II. If we are living in the conscious realization of our Lord's mediatorial work in Heaven, how often shall we invoke His aid! In our many sorrows and trials, in our disappointments and failures, in affliction and suffering of mind and body, we believe that nothing is too great, nothing too small, to be a matter of solicitude to Him Who loves us so dearly. We shall therefore carry to Him all our difficulties and distresses, imploring His help. And more than this, remembering that He is the Propitiation for our sins, we shall bring them to our Heavenly Father, pleading the all-prevailing intercession of His dear Son. How comforting is this revelation of the work of Jesus Christ in Heaven, that the fruits of His birth and death, of His resurrection and ascension are His intercession. *We have an advocate with the Father*, therefore we can never despair, nor even give way to discouragement.

III. *That Thy beloved may be delivered, save with Thy right hand, and answer me.* The occasion was evidently critical, the prayer is therefore urgent—*Save with Thy right hand, and answer me.* Christ in the Gospels has taught us, both by word and example, much about prayer. Two of His Parables—those of the Unjust Judge and of the Friend at Midnight (S. Luke xviii. 1-7 ; xi. 10)—bring home to us that prayer must be persevering and importunate—that we *ought always to pray, and not to faint.* And by His prayer in Gethsemane in His agony Christ sets before us the example of short, fervent prayers, in time of great necessity.

THE PRAYER OF THE AFFLICTED

"But deal Thou with me, O God the Lord, for Thy Name's sake : because Thy mercy is good, deliver Thou me, for I am poor and needy, and my heart is wounded within me."—
PSALM CIX. 21-22.

I. THERE are few more beautiful or more instructive prayers in the Psalter than that contained in these verses. We may note, first, the indefiniteness of the petition—*Deal Thou with me*. But how? that is left entirely to God, except for the two clauses—"for Thy Name's sake" and "because Thy mercy is good." The Name of God signifies that which God is, His character. For us Christians it is plainly revealed as Love—"God is Love" (1 S. John iv. 16). Another attribute of God is "mercy"; and His mercy is essentially good. In uttering this prayer, therefore, the Psalmist asks God to deal with him according to His love and His mercy, that is, to give him what God in His wisdom knows to be best for him, whether this be to give or to withhold that on which he has set his heart. Then the writer goes on to ask for deliverance from his bitter enemy. We may always make this prayer with confidence, since our Lord taught us to end His great prayer with the petition, *Deliver us from the Evil One*. And we know the Evil One to be our bitterest enemy.

II. Let us pass from the object of the prayer to the pleas by which it is supported.

i. *Because Thy mercy is good*. Not because the suppliant is good, but because God is good, and therefore whatever form His mercy may take, it must also be good.

ii. *For I am poor and needy*. The second plea is not based on David's exalted position as King, or on his riches, or merits; but, on the contrary, on his poverty and need. What does poverty mean? David was not poor in the ordinary sense of the word. Our Lord provides the explanation, when He says, *Blessed are the poor in spirit : for theirs is the kingdom of heaven* (S. Matt. v. 3). Does this then mean the spiritually poor? Certainly, not always; for there are many, like the people of Laodicea, who think

themselves rich spiritually, and as having need of nothing (cf. Rev. iii. 15-18). No ; it means those who know, and feel, and confess themselves to be spiritually poor, and who see in themselves no merit or goodness of their own. These put all their trust in God's mercy, and in the merits of Christ ; their most prevailing plea is their own recognition of the greatness of their need.

iii. *Because my heart is wounded.* Because I am broken-hearted. It was foretold of Christ that He should bind up the broken-hearted (Isa. lxi. 1 ; S. Luke iv. 18).

III. *For He shall stand at the right hand of the needy, to save him from them that judge his soul* (v. 31). What a blessed assurance ! not only in Heaven Jesus our Mediator ; but on earth God, Jesus the Friend of sinners, is with us when men condemn us ; and He is more than a friend, He stands beside us as our surety and bondsman. He produces the acquittal of our debt, signed and sealed in His own blood.

In one of the older Rabbinical commentaries, quoted by Edersheim, there is a very beautiful application of this passage. "Whensoever a poor man stands at thy door, the Holy One, blessed be His Name, stands at his right hand. If thou givest him alms, know that thou shalt receive a reward from Him Who stands at his right hand."

THE DUTY OF PRAISE

"Praise ye the Lord. I will give thanks unto the Lord with my whole heart, in the council of the upright, and in the congregation. The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein."—PSALM CXI. 1, 2.

IN the first verse is set forth the purpose of this Psalm—the praise of God. The verses that follow supply the reasons for that praise.

I. The Psalm begins with Hallelujah (Praise the Lord); and goes on to describe the character of true praise.

The praise of God is the true end of man's creation. For, as S. Ignatius says, "Man was created to praise, honour, and serve God ; and so to save his soul." But this praise, if it is to be acceptable to God, must be sincere : not the mere words of our mouth but the meditation of our heart. We must put all our heart into the work of praise—*with my whole heart*, that is, with undivided affections, holding nothing back which could interfere with the fulness and perfection of our praise. And as our praise is to be whole-hearted, so it is to find expression everywhere—*In the congregation*, where we must meet together to praise God ; and in the more secret gatherings of earnest and pious men. *In the council of the upright*. The word "counsel" is used (in Ps. xxv. 14) in the sense of "secret," and implies a narrower and more intimate circle than "congregation." But we are to praise God everywhere, not only in the Church but in the market-place—in our business life; in the home circle—in our family life ; for the first duty of man is to praise God.

II. A reason why we should praise God—Because *the works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein*. Whether regarded from the point of view of quantity, or quality, or magnitude, God's works are very great. He created all things. *And God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good* (Gen. i. 31). But the greatest, and the best, for which our praise must never cease in time and in eternity, was the redemption of man through our Lord Jesus Christ.

His works must be sought out. That is, they must be studied in order that they may be known, and known that they may be loved. And this we may take especially of His works of grace. A favourite application of this Psalm, by S. Augustine, Theodoret, and others, has been to the Holy Eucharist, which they see implied in *He hath made His wonderful works to be remembered . . . He hath given meat unto them that fear Him* (vv. 4, 5). For, in the sacrament of His Love, "He instituted a perpetual memory of that His precious death" (the greatest of His works), and "according to His institution, in remembrance of His death and passion, we "are" partakers of His Body and Blood"—the meat He gives *unto them that fear Him*.

III. It is this reference to the Eucharist (as some have observed) that makes this an Easter Psalm. For what would the festival be without our Easter Communion ! Then, especially, we commemorate the wonderful death and glorious resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and feed upon the sacred gifts of His Body and Blood. As the principal purposes for which the Eucharist is offered are Praise, Thanksgiving, Propitiation, and Impetration, we may, in connection with the Easter Celebration, use this Psalm as a fitting expression of the first two—Praise and Thanksgiving. Then, we praise God for His greatest work of mercy to man in giving His Only Begotten Son to die for our sins, and to be raised from the dead for our justification (cf. Rom. iv. 25). Then, we thank Him for all the graces and blessings that flow from this supreme act of God's love.

A SONG OF PRAISE

"Praise the Lord, ye servants : O praise the Name of the Lord. Blessed be the Name of the Lord : from this time forth for evermore. The Lord's Name is praised : from the rising up of the sun unto the going down of the same."—PSALM cxiii. 1-3.

WITH this Psalm begin the group of six psalms (113-118) to which was given the title of "The Hallel." From a very early date they were recited by the Jews at their three great Festivals, and at the Feast of the Dedication, and at the New Moons. On the night of the Passover the group was divided, Psalms cxiii, cxiv, being sung before the meal, just before the drinking of the second cup, and cxv.-cxviii. after the filling of the fourth cup. It is thought that the clause, "When they had sung an hymn" (ὑμνήσαντες) (S. Matt. xxvi. 30 ; S. Mark xiv. 26) refers to the singing of these psalms by our Lord and His Apostles before going forth to Gethsemane. The resemblance of this Psalm to the Magnificat of Hannah (1 Sam. ii. 1-10), which is reproduced with still greater force in that of the B.V. Mary, is very striking. Both are expressions of thankful joy for a marvellous childbirth and in appointing this Psalm for Easter the Church uses it as her thanksgiving for the birth, from the grave, of Christ, the Only Begotten of the dead. The Psalm falls into three divisions of praise.

I. The servants of the Lord are called on to praise Him (vv. 1-3). In this division we may notice the threefold utterance of the Divine Name as suggesting the mystery of the Holy Trinity, to Whom all praise is offered.

i. The eternity of the song of praise—*From this time forth for evermore* does not imply that God only now begins to be praised, but that each of us as we enter life makes a beginning of joining the hymn of Creation. *For evermore* reminds us that, if we continue to persevere in the service of God, our praises begun now will have no end, for they shall be perpetuated in the ceaseless songs of heaven.

ii. *From the rising up of the sun unto the going down of the same* (v. 3). Not only is God's praise ceaseless but univer-

sal, not confined to the Holy Land or to the Jews, but extending to the uttermost bounds of the earth.

II. The greatness and condescension of God (vv. 4-6). Although infinitely exalted above all creatures, in His love He beholds, that is, regards with interest and compassion, all the works of His, whether in heaven or earth, angels or men. The best commentary on this verse is found in the words of Isaiah—*For thus saith the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, Whose Name is Holy : I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones* (Isa. lvii. 15).

III. The last division records God's mercy and blessing upon the poor, and needy, and disappointed. The poor and needy God often raises from their low estate to work for Him (and for their fellow men) in positions of great usefulness, both in things spiritual and material. In the former we behold the B.V. Mary raised to the supreme honour of co-operating with the Holy Ghost in the mystery of the Incarnation by which man was taken into God. In the latter we see many of humble origin, by their character and genius, rising to great eminence, and becoming benefactors of the race by discoveries they have made in the realm of physics, or by improvements they have introduced in social and political life, or by their benefactions for the amelioration of the lot of the poor and suffering. The disappointed—the barren women who are to be joyful mothers of children (cf. v. 8). In a mystical sense this has been taken of the spiritually dead who shall hear the voice of the Son of God . . . and live (S. John v. 25). These children are those given to the Church through spiritual resurrection or the new birth of the soul.

THE SOUL THE SANCTUARY OF GOD

"When Israel went forth out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language; Judah became His sanctuary, Israel His dominion."—PSALM CXIV. 1, 2.

THE sublime song of the Exodus! But what was the peculiar signification of the Exodus? It was not only deliverance from the bondage of Egypt and the beginning of their national life.

I. It was also the consecration of Israel as a nation to be the people of God. This is the true theme of the Psalm: that when Israel went out of Egypt, *Judah became His sanctuary*. All else in the Psalm is but a poetic description of the wonder and joy of the inanimate creatures who were used as instruments for the accomplishment of God's purpose. Never before in the history of man had so stupendous a privilege been vouchsafed to any nation, that it should become the Sanctuary of God! Consecrated by their baptism in the Red Sea, and at Sinai brought into covenant relation with God, henceforth Israel was to be unique among the nations as the religious teacher of the world. In this verse Judah does not denote the royal tribe but the whole land of Judea, to which in later years it gave its name. In Israel God set up His tabernacle with its mercy-seat, the place of God's Presence among His people (cf. Exod. xxv. 21, 22).

II. The soul the Sanctuary of God. What the Jewish nation, as a whole, was to God, that each baptized soul now is; for it is His Sanctuary. By virtue of the baptismal gifts, and through the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, we become a temple (*vaðs sanctuary*) of God (I Cor. iii. 16).

The most glorious event of the Exodus was the consecration of Israel to be God's sanctuary. But this was a means to a great end, the establishment of the people in the promised land. So the baptismal gift by which God the Holy Ghost takes up His abode in us is but the beginning of a life consecrated to the service of God. The Exodus was followed by the wanderings of Israel in the wilderness, which represent to us the soul's pilgrimage through this

world in preparation for its entrance upon that life in the unveiled Presence of God, which is the supreme goal of all our hopes and the perfect fulfilment of all God's promises.

The purpose of the wanderings was a disciplinary preparation to fit Israel to enter upon their promised inheritance. We must realize that our pilgrimage here is a time of great responsibility ; and that as God by His Presence guided the people through all the difficulties and dangers of the wanderings, so He guides us through the perils that threaten us to the attainment of treasures which must be won in this life that they may be enjoyed in that which is to come. The Holy Ghost is to guide us into all the truth ; and more, to take of the things of Christ and declare them unto us (cf. S. John xvi. 13, 14). Truth is not merely a matter of future revelation, it is a term of present moral effort under the guidance of the Spirit of truth ; and, besides this, it is by the work of the Holy Ghost that Christ is to be so revealed to us that by a gradual assimilation of His mind and character we may be conformed to the image of Christ, and so prepared for the ultimate assimilation of His glory (cf. Rom. viii. 29 ; Col. i. 27).

III. We must endeavour to do the work and face the trials of life, day by day, in the spirit of the Israelites when they began each march under the leadership of the cloud. They felt that God Himself was their Guide ; for when the cloud moved the Ark set forward. So, whether our lot at any time be working or waiting, let us bear in mind that we are God's Sanctuary, that He is in us, and that He will enable us to accomplish that to which He calls us.

THE WORLD'S TAUNT TO THE CHRISTIAN

"Wherefore should the nations say, Where is now their God? But our God is in the heavens: He hath done whatsoever He pleased. Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands."—PSALM CXV. 2-4.

I. THIS is evidently one of the later liturgical Psalms, probably written for the services of the second Temple. In Ezra and Nehemiah we read of the contempt and scorn, as well as of the active opposition, which the returned exiles had to bear from the heathen who had been settled in Palestine (cf. Ezra iv., Neh. ii. 19; iv. 3). We can therefore well imagine some such taunting question as *Where is now thy God?* being addressed to the feeble remnant of the nation who were striving to rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple. The word "now" (in our versions) is not an adverb of time but an interjection, used as a taunt. The rendering should therefore be "Where, now, is thy God?" The "But" or "Yet" of the next verse introduces the answer to the taunt; and this is followed by a retort. God, they reply, is ruling in Heaven, invisible it is true, but absolute in power. The humiliation of His people was His work—a punishment for their sins; and their restoration was also His work—a manifestation of His mercy. Then comes the telling retort—The gods of the heathen are silver and gold, the work of men's hands; more impotent even than their makers. *They that make them shall be like unto them; Yea, every one that trusteth in them* (v. 8). We may note the scorn with which the Israelites regard idols. And yet idolatry had been their own besetting sin for many generations, and was the cause of their punishment. But the captivity in Babylon had done its work well; for throughout the rest of their history there was never the slightest lapse into idolatry. It had been utterly eradicated from among them.

II. Is not this now the taunt of the ungodly and unbeliever? The worldling scoffs at the powerlessness of Christianity to control society, at its inconsistencies and disunion. Our reply still is, *Our God is in the heavens:*

He hath done whatsoever He pleased. For His own wise purpose He permits the feebleness and struggles of His Church, He allows it to suffer persecution, as He suffered it Himself when He was on earth. It is not difficult to see that this is part of the discipline of His followers, of whom Christ said, *If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me* (S. Matt. xvi. 24). This is also necessary for the spiritual power and influence of the Church ; for when she has been able to rule the world, she has always succumbed to the temptations of the world. But, when she has been persecuted, her spiritual sway has been most potent.

III. Can we not also retort the taunt of the world, as the Psalmist does ? Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. The heathen of old offered sacrifices to idols of silver and gold, but this cost them something. Sometimes, we read, they cut themselves with knives, sometimes they even offered their children to the fire. And then they certainly got nothing in return. Besides they had the excuse of ignorance : they knew no better. The worldling has not this excuse. He is not ignorant ; and he gets his full reward—the enjoyment of pleasures and honours and riches. His idols of silver and gold are very potent in giving him in this life the gratification of his heart's desire. S. John's warning—*My little children, guard yourselves from idols* (I S. John v. 21)—is as much needed in the civilized world to-day as ever it was in the Apostolic age. Let me seriously ask myself whether any idol has gained possession of my heart.

THE REST OF THE SOUL

“Return unto thy rest, O my soul ; for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee.”—PSALM CXVI. 7.

I. THERE are many interests in life which attract a man : the interests of his business, the delights of travel, or of study, or art, or music. But sooner or later for all men comes the desire for rest. The most untiring worker at times needs rest ; and indeed the worker perhaps more than anyone requires relaxation from the strain of continual effort. He seeks it, and to some extent finds it, in the enjoyment of home. But this is not the rest of which the Psalmist speaks—the rest of the soul. Quite apart from the multifarious desires for success in the work of life, there is a craving in the soul of man for that rest which can only be found in God. The word “return” tells us that the writer had found that true rest, had tasted of its sweetness ; but had either been allured by the attractions of the world or driven by the exigencies of work into that state of strain of which our Lord speaks, when He says, *Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest* (S. Matt. xi. 28). The Psalmist, at least at one time, had known by blessed experience where that rest was to be found—in God.

II. Rest in God is the blessed experience of the soul that has given itself to God in loving trust, and the continuance of this rest amidst the trials and distractions of life depends upon the development of that trust which is a special characteristic of some souls. This, like all characteristics of the soul, is in the first place a gift of God ; but then, like other gifts, needs to be trained and developed by discipline. It is therefore a virtue which in its higher and more abiding state has to be won by continued effort. *Though He slay me, yet will I wait for Him* implies this struggle, and its abiding issue is found in David’s beautiful words, *Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil ; for Thou art with me : Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me* (Job xiii. 15 ; Ps. xxiii. 4). Without this trust there can be no real rest in God, but with

it all life's troubles are transformed into opportunities of resting in Him. The world's warfare may rage around us, but *Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee : because he trusteth in Thee* (Isa. xxvi. 3).

III. This passage carries us in thought to the episode of Noah's dove ; for the word translated " rest " is, in the Heb., Noah—*Return unto thy Noah*. The dove (a type of the soul) winged her way over the flooded trees and fields, but found no rest for the sole of her foot ; she therefore returned to the Ark, and Noah *put forth his hand, and took her, and brought her in unto him into the Ark* (Gen. viii. 9). So, many a soul, which once had tasted the sweetness of rest in God, has gone back to the attractions of the world, and has perhaps found in them excitement, the fascination of adulation, the gratification of ambition, the intoxication of success. But of that which the soul craves—Rest—there is none. Then in a moment of reaction, when the pleadings of the soul are heard, there is the response, *Return unto thy rest, O my soul, return unto thy Noah*. And where can those who have strayed into the paths of sin find rest ? In the Ark of Christ's Church, in the sacraments of grace. The penitent soul seeking food and rest there finds the Pierced Hands stretched forth to welcome him, and to bring him once more into the Ark of rest, where there is room enough for all (πανδοχεῖον S. Luke x. 34). There the wine of the precious blood and the oil of the Holy Spirit cleanse and heal his wounds. There food is given him, the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthening and refreshing the weak and wearied soul.

THREE PROPERTIES OF THE HEAVENLY LIFE

“For Thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling.”—PSALM CXVI. 8.

THESE words are a continuation of the preceding verse—*Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee.* They enumerate three special gifts of God’s bounty. Bellarmine has pointed out that they correspond in a very striking manner with the three chief properties of the life of the blessed in Heaven—immortality, impassibility, and security. Let us consider them.

I. *Thou hast delivered my soul from death.* The Psalm was evidently written by one who had been in peril of death (v. 3); it is the thanksgiving of a faithful heart for deliverance which has been vouchsafed. This life is passed in the valley of the shadow of death. The marks of death are all around us; the withered leaves of autumn, the frequent tolling of the church-bell remind us of the universality of the great law—*It is appointed unto men once to die* (Heb. ix. 27). There is no possibility of escape from death. Sickness may bring us to the threshold of the grave, and by God’s goodness we may find deliverance; but it is only a reprieve. We know that, so long as this present world shall last, our enemy will return again and again, and that in the end he will prevail. For death is the last enemy that shall be abolished; and that not until the general resurrection (I Cor. xv. 26). *But, when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory* (I Cor. xv. 54; Isa. xxv. 8). Then God will for ever deliver our soul from death, then we shall throughout eternity dwell in that land of the living where death shall be no more (Rev. xxi. 4).

II. *Mine eyes from tears.* This world is not only the valley of the shadow of death, but the vale of tears. For sorrow is king here below, and sooner or later every heart is touched by his sceptre. Then, too, our joys are but

transient ; for when the sunshine of happiness is brightest there is in the distance the dark cloud that tells of change, that happiness will not last. But, when death shall be no more, God *shall wipe away every tear from their eyes ; . . . neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more* (Rev. xxi. 4). The second property of our life in Heaven is that we shall be impassible, that we can never again experience suffering.

III. *My feet from falling.* Worse than the clouds of sorrow are the storms of temptation which so constantly break upon us. *My son, if thou come to serve the Lord, prepare thy soul for temptation* (Ecclus. ii. 1). Yes ; we must be always prepared, for we know not at what moment some temptation may assail us. Temptation is not always an evil ; for by it we are being tested ; disciplined, and prepared for eternity. S. James says, *Blessed is the man that endureth temptation : for when he hath been approved, he shall receive the crown of life* (i. 12). But it is always a peril. We walk in the midst of temptations, and at any moment our foot may slip, and we may fall. The thought of this must keep us always watchful, but always fearful. One of the joys of Heaven is the assurance of perfect security, the absence of any possibility of temptation. *Him that overcometh, the promise is, will I make a pillar in the house of my God, . . . and I will write upon him the name of my God* (Rev. iii. 12). A pillar ! the very emblem of stability and security. So the Psalmist in this passage anticipates the fulness of God's bounty which shall be ours in the kingdom of His love.

WHOLE-HEARTEDNESS

“Blessed are they that are perfect in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord. Blessed are they that keep His testimonies, that seek Him with the whole heart.”—PSALM cxix. 1, 2.

THIS “Psalm of the Saints” first sets before us the goal of perfection, as their great object of endeavour ; and then goes on to point out the chief means by which that goal may be attained—the whole-hearted service of God.

I. In every sphere of action, success is the reward of thoroughness. It has been said that nine-tenths of genius consists in taking pains, that is, in throwing ourselves into our work with our whole heart. Whether in the domain of art, literature, or commerce, etc., the crown is only won by the diligent ; for the most gifted artist or musician is not exempted from the drudgery necessary to master the technique of his profession. Moreover, it is essential that there should be also the concentration of all our forces upon the one object of our endeavour. Many a man’s life is a failure because he has dissipated his strength upon too many interests, with the result that he has only succeeded in doing many things poorly. If, in the various provinces of the world’s business, whole-heartedness be needed, how much more is it required in the supreme kingdom of the soul’s life—religion ? For there is no occupation which demands such strenuous concentration of all our forces as the seeking after God. *Blessed are they that seek Him with the whole heart.* We may trace this especially in the two spheres of religious thought and action.

II. The life of prayer. This must ever come first, since no work can be pleasing to God that is done merely in the power of our own natural gifts. We must give ourselves to God before we can acceptably give Him our work ; and this oblation of self to God is made chiefly in the life of prayer. But in prayer the thing most needed is concentration of thought, the effort of the will to fix itself intensely upon the subject of our petitions.

The listless attitude, the wandering thoughts, that render worthless so many of our prayers is largely the result of a lack of whole-heartedness. This comes under the Psalmist's description—*They flattered Him with their mouth, and lied unto Him with their tongue. For their heart was not right with Him* (Ps. lxxviii. 36). Prayers, however beautiful in word or thought, which are but the utterance of the lips without real earnestness, are but flattering words and faithless promises ; they are therefore untrue and quite valueless. Take for your model in prayer our Lord's prayer in Gethsemane. The Holy Ghost, through the Evangelist, describes it as an agony, so intense that its physical effect was seen in the sweat of blood. The writer of the Hebrews dwells on the strong crying with tears, and the godly fear on account of which He was heard (cf. S. Luke xxii. 44 ; Heb. v. 7).

III. The life of service. To serve God is indeed a glorious service, demanding the very best efforts of mind, body, and soul. The work entrusted to us is so important, nothing less than the interests of God on earth, the salvation of souls for whom Christ died, the propagation of that Gospel which alone can make man wise unto salvation—the antidote to all human ills. How can we dare to fulfil this service in a slothful, slovenly, careless way, to devote to it only a part of our lives ? Surely it is the one thing in life which demands our whole heart—all our time, and strength, and thought. The world, the flesh, and the devil, all will strive to hinder us in our task ; but we must reply in the words of Nehemiah—*I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down : why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you ?* (Neh. vi. 3). Nehemiah was restoring only the earthly, temporal Jerusalem. We are building Jerusalem that is above, which is eternal.

THE HEART'S LIBERTY

"I will run the way of Thy commandments, when Thou hast set my heart at liberty."—PSALM CXIX. 32.

THE R.V. renders the last clause—*When Thou shalt enlarge my heart*. The word translated "enlarge" signifies to expand, in the sense of liberty from trammels which hinder expansion. There is, therefore, no essential difference between the two translations; and we may retain the better-known rendering of the P.B. version. The idea of "running" suggests a freedom of movement which is only possible when the limbs are unfettered; and, in a race, to render this as complete as possible all superfluous clothing is removed. What are the shackles that restrict the heart, and prevent it from running the way of God's commandments?

I. The chains of habit. These are like the web of the spider, formed of an immense number of minute gossamer threads, each one so fragile that alone it is easily broken, but the whole is woven so closely together that it is able to hold captive its victim. So is it with us. Habits are made up of a countless series of separate acts, each perhaps, at first, unimportant; but gradually they are woven into a net in which we become entangled, and lose our freedom—habits of self-indulgence, of sloth, of exaggeration, of untruthfulness; besides the graver habits of yielding to the passions of our lower nature, or to the seductions of the world. All these habits are manipulated by our spiritual foe to enthrall us in the bondage of sin. Well may we pray with the Psalmist—*Pluck me out of the net that they have laid privily for me; for Thou art my stronghold* (Ps. xxxi. 4).

II. The commandments of the world. The code of morals and of social precepts, decreed by the world, is directly opposed to the law of God, both in their spirit and purpose. It is impossible to serve two masters, God and mammon; and those who attempt to do this, to accommodate the law of God to the requirements of the world, are not only hindered in *running* the way of God's commandments, but even in *walking* in them with any success.

III. If we cannot help ourselves God can, and will, help us. If we cannot break the chains of habit, or emancipate ourselves from the slavery of the world, He can set us free. It was for this that Christ came into the world, to break the bonds of sin, to free us from the tyranny of the world, the flesh, and the devil. *There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and of death* (Rom. viii. 1, 2). Then, in the exuberance of the delight of recovered freedom, we shall run the way of God's commandments. Walking will be too slow a pace. Then shall we have learned by the painful experience of bondage that *it is an evil thing and a bitter to have forsaken the Lord our God* (cf. Jer. ii. 19) ; but that His service is perfect freedom. How jealously we shall guard our heart, lest any habit, displeasing to our Lord, shall again begin to spin its entangling web over it. How carefully we shall avoid the nets with which the world attempts to ensnare us. The service of Christ will be our delight, for it will be the service of love. As we meditate on the Passion we shall feel with S. Paul, so *He loved me, and gave Himself up for me* ; and that love of Christ will constrain us to give ourselves more wholly to Him (cf. Gal. ii. 20 ; 2 Cor. v. 14). As we look back upon the shame and misery of the bondage from which He delivered us, and contrast it with the happiness and joy of our new life in Him, love will fill our hearts, and inspire us with the burning desire to do something to show our gratitude. But remembering that we can do nothing of ourselves, we shall diligently seek His grace ; and our daily prayer to Jesus our King will be : *Draw me : we will run after Thee* (Cant. i. 4).

FINAL PERSEVERANCE

"Teach me, O Lord, the way of Thy statutes ; and I shall keep it unto the end."—PSALM CXIX. 33.

IN this stanza we may notice a peculiarity found in no other, that there is a distinct and separate petition in each of the eight verses ; and that in six of them there is added to the petition a plea for being heard. In the last verse of the preceding stanza the writer had resolved to run the way of God's Commandments. Now, realizing his own proneness to error, he beseeches God to be his Teacher and Guide. The wording of this verse suggests two tremendous questions, on which depend our place in eternity.

i. Of all the various paths in life which stretch out before us which is the one of God's appointment ? The straight way that leads to eternal life ? And am I walking in that way ?

ii. If I am, shall I persevere to the end ?

I. *Teach me, O Lord, the way of Thy statutes.* S. Bernard once said, "He who is his own pupil has a fool for his master." If this be true of the teachings of this world, how much more is it so of that heavenly knowledge which alone can make us wise unto salvation ! If we are humble, we shall realize our need of an infallible Teacher, and seek instruction in the way of holiness of the greatest of Masters, our Lord Jesus Christ, Who said, *Learn of me ; for I am meek and lowly in heart : and ye shall find rest unto your souls* (S. Matt. xi. 29). How much we have to learn concerning God's commandments ! We can learn them best as set forth in the life and teaching of the Son of God, that not in ambition and self-assertion, but in lowliness and meekness we are to find rest for our unquiet souls. The "WAY of Jesus," we are constantly reminded, is the way of the Cross ; and no one can be His disciple who is not prepared to deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Christ (cf. S. Luke ix. 23).

II. *I shall keep it unto the end.* This suggests the other question—Shall I persevere unto the end ? If God be my

Teacher and Guide, and I use the grace He so plentifully bestows upon me, I can do so. For S. Paul says : I am (being) *confident of this very thing, that He which began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ* (Phil. i. 6). S. Philip Neri was once talking with a young man of strong religious feelings, but of worldly life, who met his appeals with the difficulty—If I were sure that I should persevere, I would indeed give myself to Christ ; but of so many around me who have enrolled themselves with great fervour in His service, I see so few who persevere that I fear to make the attempt. S. Philip answered : My son, if you were sure you would persevere, what would you do ? The young man said : I would make a rule of life—to say my prayers night and morning, to go regularly to confession and communion, to devote a tenth of my income and a part of my time to work for Christ. Do these things, replied the Saint ; do them regularly. When you are tempted to relax or omit any one of them, resist the temptation at once, and you will persevere. The loss of perseverance generally begins by giving up some devout practice. This weakens the soul, and renders it liable to yield when tempted.

III. The grace of final perseverance, like that of regeneration, is the gift of God. No man can merit it ; but it is freely given to those who diligently and continually seek it. Every day of our life it should form a distinct petition in our prayers ; and we should fear lest the day it is omitted some special temptation should assail us ; that, if yielded to, would be the beginning of our turning aside from the right way, the first step in the downward path, the first halt in our Heavenward march, and that our march may never again be steadfastly resumed.

MEDITATION

"I will lift up my hands also unto Thy commandments which I have loved; And I will meditate in Thy statutes."—PSALM cxix. 48.

THIS wonderful Psalm has been well termed "A Meditation upon The Divine Law." Throughout its 172 verses (as the Masorites point out) there is in every verse except one (122) a direct reference to the Law, under one of the ten names assigned to it—word, saying, testimonies, way, judgment, precept, commandment, law, statute, faithfulness for, according to another reading, righteousness). The Law referred to is evidently the written Law, and the late date of the Psalm may be inferred from the fact that it seems to have been at that time in the hands of the people, as the result of the efforts of Ezra and Nehemiah. The subject of the Psalmist's meditation divides itself into two heads—God's Word and our ways.

I. Meditation has been pronounced to be, in our days, "a lost art, if not a lost faculty." The interests of men, to-day, are so numerous and so diverse, that prolonged and concentrated thought, such as is implied by meditation, has become exceedingly difficult; and deep and settled convictions with regard to the great realities of the soul's life are therefore becoming extremely rare. With the continuous and multifarious output of books on every conceivable subject, there is the danger that, in our times, men read much, but think little. The superficial quality of most of the books produced, and the babel of opinions set forth therein, conduce to a general unsettlement of mind, which renders the development of character, and the formation of the religious spirit, increasingly difficult.

II. If we sincerely desire to be able to resist the various forces of the world which tend to draw us away from God, and to impregnate us with the spirit of worldliness, we *must* learn to practise meditation, however irksome and difficult it, at first, may seem to be. We *must* go "aside from the multitude" (S. Mark vii. 32-35), that we may be alone with God; and that by intimate communion with Him

our ears may be opened to hear His voice, and the string of our tongue loosed to utter His praise, and to make known to Him, in earnest prayer, the needs of our soul. That we may accomplish this, a certain definite time should be set apart each day for meditation ; and this should be religiously spent in His Presence : first, in thinking out some of the great questions of the soul's life—the hindrances and helps to spiritual progress ; secondly, in communing with God, conversing with Him concerning the difficulties that oppose us, telling Him of our earnest desire to do His will ; and listening for His answer to our perplexities.

III. The two chief subjects of our meditation, as set before us in this Psalm, are God's Word and our ways—what God teaches us of His holy Law, and what our conscience tells us of our own way of life : the one is the pattern set before us by God, the other the record of our efforts in following that pattern ; the confession of our failures on the one hand, and on the other, that of God's goodness in enabling us, by His grace, to make some progress in the way which leads to Heaven.

The Word of God that comes to us in meditation is altogether different from anything we read in spiritual books. That was what God said to someone else, and though it may appeal to our spiritual sense as helpful, it does not speak to our conscience with the force of conviction that we experience in hearing God's utterance in meditation. What God says then is the direct answer to our prayer, the clear guidance of His voice with regard to our own immediate needs.

GOD'S FAITHFULNESS IN AFFLICTING US

"I know, O Lord, that Thy judgments are righteous, And that in faithfulness Thou hast afflicted me."—PSALM CXIX. 75.

ONE of the attributes of God, revealed to us in H.S., is Faithfulness in sending us the troubles and afflictions with which He visits us. The soul that is united with God, and enlightened by the Holy Spirit, recognizes in the sorrows of life, God's faithfulness ; and, as here, confesses it. The natural man, alienated from God by sin, has false views of God, and regards the sufferings which are his lot, as a mark of God's displeasure and cruelty. The former view leads to perfect trust in God, the latter to pessimism and unbelief.

In this, and in the preceding stanza, the Psalmist dwells especially upon God's dealings with us in affliction. He refers to it no less than three times—*Before I was afflicted I went astray ; but now I observe Thy word* (v. 67). *It is good for me that I have been afflicted ; that I might learn Thy statutes* (v. 71). And in our text (v. 75). Let us consider each.

I. *Before I was afflicted I went astray ; but now I observe Thy word.*

Written shortly after the return from captivity, this verse is the confession of the experience of the Jewish people. Before their great national disaster, they were constantly rebelling against God, and indulging in the idolatry of their neighbours ; but after their return, they never again yielded to these sins. It is, however, in individual experience that these words have proved most true. How many can look back upon the period, when they basked in the sunshine of the world's prosperity, and see that it was a time when they were living without God ! But trouble came, and brought them to an acknowledgment of their sin, and to penitence ; after which they observed God's commandments, and enrolled themselves in His service.

II. *It is good for me that I have been afflicted ; that I might learn Thy statutes.* This is the logical sequence of the preceding. The former contained a recognition of the

fact, that before the writer had been afflicted, he went astray, and that as the result of that discipline he was brought back into the right path, and led to the observance of God's law. This verse carries him a step farther in the confession that it was therefore good for him that he had suffered, since it brought him to God, and taught him God's statutes. If we carefully search the experiences of our own life, is not this the discovery of most sincere Christians—that the afflictions which have befallen them have proved to be blessings in disguise? They were hard to endure at the time, but afterwards they yielded the peaceable fruit of righteousness (cf. Heb. xii. 11), that is, they brought us nearer to God, taught us more of the love of His compassion, and left us more zealous in serving Him.

III. *I know, O Lord . . . that in faithfulness Thou hast afflicted me. Faithful are the wounds of a friend* (Prov. xxvii. 6). And God is the best friend that any man ever had. He does not pander to our weakness, or flatter our vanity. He does not leave us to go our own way, when that way is hurtful to us. He wounds us with the arrows of affliction, that when they have done their work, He may bind up our wounds, pouring in oil and wine: the cleansing blood of His dear Son, the healing unction of His Holy Spirit. *God is FAITHFUL, Who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation make also the way of escape, that ye may be able to endure it* (I Cor. x. 13). We must remember that the word "temptation" does not necessarily always mean temptation to evil, but that it includes all those trials and testings of the soul which are necessary for its development and sanctification.

THE SPIRIT OF WISDOM

"How sweet are Thy words unto my taste ! Yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth !—PSALM cxix. 103.

I. OF the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, infused into the soul at Baptism, and forming an important part of its spiritual endowments, the highest is the gift of wisdom. These endowments exist in the natural man, but in an altogether lower order. By the gift of grace they are transformed, and raised to the higher supernatural order. There were many wise men among the Jews, and even among the heathen, before the Incarnation ; but their wisdom was of a lower order, since they had not, to enlighten and to guide them, the indwelling of the Holy Ghost. The word "wisdom," both in Latin and Greek (*sapere*, akin to *σαφής*), has for its underlying conception the idea of "taste." It is an intuitive gift, which operates without the processes of ratiocination. Each of our senses conveys to us its own peculiar perception of its object. The ideas of the same thing, communicated to us by sight, touch, and taste, differ, in that each acquaints us with a property of the object which is unrecognized by the others. So it is with the Word of God. To the mere scholar it appeals only from a literary standpoint, as beautiful in form and expression, and as teaching philosophy and ethics of a very high standard. To those endowed with the spiritual gift of wisdom, it has, in addition to this, a message to the conscience and soul from the God Who created them : a message that can only be apprehended by those who possess that spiritual insight which enables them intuitively to recognize the things of God and to *relish* them. Such can say with the Psalmist, *O TASTE and see that the Lord is good : Blessed is the man that trusteth in Him* (Ps. xxxiv. 8).

II. But what does the Psalmist propose for our taste ? The Word of God. Of this S. Paul tells us, *Every Scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness* (II Tim. iii. 16). *Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that through patience and through*

comfort of the Scriptures we might have hope (Rom. xv. 4). Hope is the spring of action, and meditation on the Word of God supplies the fuel of hope, that is, of supernatural hope, inspiring us with energy to strive for the things of Heaven. Hope is described *as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast and entering into that which is within the veil; whither as a forerunner Jesus entered for us* (Heb. vi. 19, 20). Meditation on the Word of God quickens our hopes, and stimulates us to greater effort to attain those good things which are revealed in it. It is sweet to dwell upon our hopes of earthly success and joy, though we often waste our time, and dissipate our strength, by building castles in the air, that, we know, can never become substantial possessions. But how much sweeter is it to taste, in meditation, those good things that God hath prepared for them that love Him, and which in meditation are revealed to us by His Holy Spirit (I Cor. ii. 9, 10).

III. In this verse, the joy of the Psalmist in the Divine Law reaches its climax. The stanza begins (v. 97), *Oh how love I Thy law!* It is his meditation all the day, and this love is expressed under various figures until it finds its culmination in the passage under our consideration. The cause of his love for God's Word is that it is one of the chief means by which God binds us to Himself. We find in the Scriptures a great channel by which we approach God, and, while seeing a legitimate interest in their intrinsic beauty, we must not rest in this, but we must let them lead us always to God by revealing to us more and more clearly God's will and purpose for us, and teaching us more and more of His character. With what joy do we receive, and read, and treasure up, a letter from one we love very dearly. Holy Scripture is a letter from God, telling us of our home in Heaven, of its interests, and of the way by which we may reach it.

HOLY SCRIPTURE A LAMP AND A LIGHT

"Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and light unto my path."—PSALM CXIX. 105.

THIS beautiful verse has always possessed a special attraction for interpreters of Holy Scripture. Their explanations of it differ, thus bearing testimony to the inexhaustible treasure of spiritual instruction which it contains, and adding to our appreciation of its riches. Let us consider some of these expositions.

I. Of the Fathers.

i. In the "lamp" S. Basil sees the Old Testament, a source of light which only imperfectly illumines the darkness ; but in the "light" he recognizes the Gospel, given by our Lord Jesus Christ, and on this account the light of the Sun of Righteousness, shedding upon all the brightness of truth.

ii. S. Augustine takes the "lamp" as the revelation of prophecy, quoting S. Peter's words—*We have the word of prophecy made more sure ; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts* (II Pet. i. 19). He reminds us of the distinction between S. John Baptist, the last of the prophets, and Christ : S. John being a mere created lamp (λύχνος). *He was the lamp that burneth and shineth. He was not the light, but came that he might bear witness of the light. Christ was the true light, even the light which lighteth every man, coming into the world* (S. John v. 35 ; i. 8, 9).

iii. S. Ambrose with greater depth points out that Christ is Himself both lamp and light. "He the Word of God is a great light to some, to others He is a lamp. To me He is a lamp ; to angels a light. He was a light to S. Peter, when the angel stood by him in prison ; and to S. Paul, when the light from Heaven shone around him, and he heard Christ saying, *Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me ?* Christ was a lamp to the Jews according to the Law, and a lamp under a bushel ; but according to the Gospel He is a great light. Open thy windows, that the light may shine on

thee ; get ready thy candlestick, that the lamp may be set thereon by the Lord."

Taking the passage in its more literal significance, we may see in it, among others, two interpretations.

II. Holy Scripture is our guide at all times. The lamp is needed especially in the hours of darkness, the light shines throughout the day. In the sunshine of prosperity, in the ordinary walks of life, we find in the general reading of the Bible light to direct our footsteps in the paths of righteousness. In the darkness of sorrow, suffering, or doubt, if we study it more closely, we shall discover passages to comfort us in sorrow, and others to teach us the beneficent and disciplinary value of suffering ; and in the darkest hours of despondency or doubt, there are still others which will lighten our gloom, and reveal to us the answer of our perplexity, the key which will unlock the door of difficulty, and provide the solution of doubt. It is the office of light to disclose the prospect that lies around us, but of a lamp to reveal that which is close to us. As the Psalmist says, God's Word is a lamp unto our feet. We can hold it close to a difficulty in our path, and save our feet from becoming entangled in any snare or net spread by the enemy in our way. Life is full of pitfalls, and the lamp of Scripture will, if rightly used, save us from them all.

III. Holy Scripture contains general principles to guide us in ordinary life, rules for the normal occurrences of every day ; but by more diligent searching we may also discover precepts to meet the special cases which require a careful consideration, a wise judgment. However unusual our temptations may seem to us, we can generally find a case like ours, or a counsel which exactly meets our perplexity, and seems written especially for our guidance.

THE SPIRIT OF UNDERSTANDING

"Deal with Thy servant according unto Thy mercy, And teach me Thy statutes. I am Thy servant, give me understanding, that I may know Thy testimonies."—PSALM cxix. 124, 125.

IN this Psalm we find the prayer for understanding repeated no less than six times (vv. 27, 34, 73, 125, 144, 169). In the mind of the writer, it is evidently a gift of exceeding value, and therefore to be sought diligently in prayer.

I. The Spirit of Understanding is the second of the Gifts of the Holy Ghost (Isa. xi. 2). It is one of the four intellectual gifts—Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, and Knowledge—by which the intellect is perfected. Like Wisdom, it exists, though in a lower order, in the natural man ; but for its perfection requires the illumination of the Holy Ghost. Understanding differs from Wisdom as the analytic from the synthetic gift. Wisdom intuitively apprehends a truth as a whole ; understanding analyses it, and reduces it to its constituents, and regards it in its various applications. An illustration of this may be found in a ray of sunlight, which may be considered simply as a beam of white light, or, by passing a pencil of it through a prism, may be broken up into the series of colours ordinarily described as red, orange, yellow, blue, indigo and violet. This prayer for understanding has for its object that the Divine Law may be applied to all the various needs and duties of the suppliant.

II. The gift of understanding is a certain spiritual discernment vouchsafed to the intellect, which enables it to penetrate beneath the surface of things, and to comprehend that which lies beneath. Intelligence has been derived from *inter* or *intus* and *legere* : to read that which is between or within the meaning of the letter. When we read a book, the eye peruses that which is without—the combinations of the letters ; but the mind grasps that which is within—the sense of the letter. There is a common phrase "to read between the lines." It implies a compre-

hension of more than meets the eye. So the gift of spiritual understanding enables us to see in the revelation of God's Word far more than is evident to the natural intellect, to penetrate into the truths brought before us ; and to perceive and delight in that harmony, proportion, and analogy of parts, that relation of one revealed truth to another, which is hidden from the unenlightened understanding. It enables the soul to know God more fully in His attributes and ineffable perfections, and in the riches of His love, as manifested in His mysterious dealings with us.

III. The three principal channels of the soul's intercourse with God are His Holy Word, Religion, and Providence. For the appreciation of each we need to exercise our spiritual understanding.

i. For the soul God's Word is indeed the book of wisdom. It contains not only a revelation of God but also of man : it is a mirror in which we may see ourselves, and learn what manner of men we are. The superficial read the letter, and perhaps recognize its beauty ; but to the understanding heart alone does it give life.

ii. Religion is to the majority little more than the outward observance of certain rites and obligations ; to the understanding heart, however, it is the appointed means of fellowship with God, the joyous exercise of the privileges of a child of God.

iii. Providence ! How perplexing are the prosperity of the wicked and the suffering and adversity of the godly ! It is the Spirit of understanding that enables us in time of adversity to say, *I know . . . that Thou of very faithfulness hast caused me to be troubled* (Ps. cxix. 75). It was that gift that inspired S. Paul to write, *We know that to them that love God all things work together for good* (Rom. viii. 28).

A MODEL PRAYER

"I have called with my whole heart ; answer me, O Lord : I will keep Thy statutes. I have called unto Thee ; save me, and I shall observe Thy testimonies."—PSALM CXIX. 145, 146.

THIS stanza possesses a special interest and importance in that it contains a very full and detailed description of the Psalmist's prayer. It is a model prayer, telling us of the manner, the matter, the time of his prayer and its plea.

I. The manner and matter of prayer.

i. The manner. How important this is ! S. James says, *Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss* (S. James iv. 3). The first characteristic of his prayer is its intensity—it is with the whole heart. It may have been a silent prayer, for there is no mention of his lips ; but it certainly was urgent, proceeding from the depths of the soul. How unlike the prayer of the man who repeats words of supplication, while he is attempting to carry on another train of thought, in which he is more interested than in what he is saying to God. S. Paul confesses, *We know not how to pray as we ought* (Rom. viii. 26) ; that is, our ignorance extends alike to the matter and manner of our prayer. But he reminds us, that to help our infirmity we have the Spirit of God, Who *maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered*. He not only pleads with us, and for us ; but *in us*, stirring our souls with great yearnings for God, which are too deep to find utterance in words. It is helpful, at the time of prayer, to invoke the aid of the Holy Spirit, beseeching Him to teach us what to pray for, and how to pray, and to stir up in us a great desire for God.

ii. The matter. We do not know precisely what was the writer's trouble, but it was evidently very pressing. *They draw nigh that persecute me with wickedness* (v. 150). Whatever it was, he prays for deliverance—*Save me !* He realizes the nearness of his foes, but he does not forget that God also is nigh (cf. v. 151), and that therefore he has not to cry for help to a God that is far off. The strength

and comfort of all who are men of prayer is that God is always nigh, and is quick to hear and answer prayer.

II. The times when he prayed. *I prevented the dawning of the morning. . . . Mine eyes prevented the night watches* (147, 148). He prayed early and late : before the dawn and during the night ; so that he forestalled the arousing call of the guards as they changed the watches, and even anticipated our Lord's injunction—*Watch therefore : for ye know not when the Lord of the house cometh, whether at even, or at midnight, or at cockcrowing, or in the morning ; lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping* (S. Mark xiii. 35). Moreover, his devotions were not limited to these seasons, for he tells us elsewhere that he praised God *seven times a day* (cf. cxix. 164).

III. The Plea. *Hear my voice according unto Thy loving kindness : Quicken me, O Lord, as Thou art wont* (v. 149). There is but one plea—God's loving-kindness ; that His " property is always to have mercy and to forgive " ; that *with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is plenteous redemption* (Ps. cxxx. 7) ; that therefore the cry, *Lord save me*, can never be in vain. God's loving-kindness was chiefly manifested on giving *His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life* (S. John iii. 16).

Quicken me as Thou art wont. With the cry for help, for salvation from his enemies, is associated the prayer for quickening within his own soul, that he may respond to God's grace, and may do his part in meeting and bravely bearing the afflictions before him.

LIKE A LOST SHEEP

"I have gone astray like a lost sheep ; seek Thy servant ; for I do not forget Thy commandments."—PSALM CXIX. 176.

Too much seems to have been made, by some modern commentators, of the incongruity of these words on the lips of one whose life had been entirely devoted to the observance of the Law of God ; for similar expressions of a sense of sinfulness, and of absolute dependence on the mercy of God, are found in the writings of most of the great saints. It is indeed eminently characteristic of the humility of sanctity that in the last words of this great Psalm, instead of a pæan of triumphant praise, we find a humble confession of weakness, of sinfulness, and of entire dependence upon the seeking love of God.

I. This verse is the fitting summing-up of the experience of a pilgrim who had been guided day and night by the Law of the Lord. In the Psalm as a whole we have had a wonderful description of the excellence of the Divine Law, and of the attraction it possesses for the heart and mind of a spiritual man ; of its own intrinsic beauty, and of its power to guide its followers in the paths of God's appointment. But besides this, we have a confession of personal weakness and sinfulness, of the beneficent effect of the discipline of suffering, and of the Psalmist's trust in God, and delight in His Word (vv. 67, 141, 176 ; 71, 75 ; 94, 114 ; 97, 103) ; ending with a prayer for continual guidance, based upon a sense of his own helplessness.

II. The image of a lost sheep—weakness and helplessness.

i. A figure of weakness. In a sheep there is not only a lack of physical strength, but also a distinct tendency to go astray. Other animals can endure fatigue, and are able to recognize signs of approaching danger ; and either by defensive armament or by swiftness of flight, they are able to protect or save themselves from their enemies. A sheep, however, soon becomes exhausted in a long journey, or by running ; and therefore cannot escape

by flight. Nor has he any weapons with which to resist the attacks of other animals. Moreover, a sheep is prone to follow blindly any leader ; and this proclivity is a constant source of danger. How many men are like this ! Probably the majority of the lost will be able to trace their fall, in its beginning, to the influence or example of another.

ii. A figure of helplessness. A sheep is devoid of the homing instinct which enables many birds and animals to find their way back to their home, however far away from it they may be. But a sheep, once lost, wanders aimlessly, und unless sought, and brought back by the shepherd, it soon perishes.

III. The beauty of humility. Humility is the one virtue without which sanctity is not possible ; for pride robs our good deeds of their merit. It is therefore fitting that this great song of a saintly pilgrimage through life should end upon the key-note of humility. The Psalm reveals a wonderful knowledge of God, and the necessary result of such knowledge must be a deep humility. We cannot live in God's presence without realizing our own sinfulness. The wisest of men, at the beginning of his career, and before pride had perverted his judgment, said, *I am but a little child. I know not how to go out or come in* (I Kings iii. 7). He asked therefore for wisdom to enable him to fulfil the task laid upon him, for guidance in the difficulties and perplexities of kingly duties. It was given him in full measure, but, alas ! pride and sensuality soon led him astray. The saintly writer of this splendid panegyric on the Law of God ended it by confessing himself a lost sheep, needing the help and guidance of the Divine Shepherd of Israel.

THE HELP OF THE SAINTS

"I will lift up mine eyes unto the mountains : From whence shall my help come ? My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth.—PSALM CXXI. 1, 2.

THE great Psalm of the Law (cxix) is followed by a group of fifteen Psalms (cxx-cxxxiv), which from their common title, "A Song of Ascent," are called "The Gradual Psalms." The explanation of this title, which has most generally commended itself to Christian writers, is that they were Pilgrim Psalms, written by different authors, but gathered into their present group for the use not only of the caravans of pilgrims going up year by year to keep the feasts at Jerusalem, but also of individual pilgrims going up for the same purpose. They therefore lend themselves well for our use, who are "strangers and pilgrims" seeking the heavenly Jerusalem.

I. The imagery of this Psalm (the second of the Graduals) is taken from the natural features of the Holy Land. The dwellers in the valleys look for help in time of oppression from the more warlike hill-tribes. S. Augustine, taking these words mystically, sees in them the help of the Saints. "By the mountains," he says, "are to be understood the great and renowned among men ; for who is greater than S. John Baptist ?" He goes on to say, "Our help is not in the mountains but from Him Whose light illuminates the mountains, from Him Who made heaven and earth." When the dawn disperses the darkness of the night, it is the mountains which first catch and reflect the rays of the rising sun. Those in the valleys behold a golden thread of light, and later the valleys themselves are bathed in glorious sunshine. "So," he says, "is it with the Apostles and first preachers of the Gospel. The Sun of righteousness arose and first brought light to Apostles and disciples of our Lord ; and they reflected that light in their preaching to the world."

II. The Psalmist, in the darkness of trouble, resolves to lift up his eyes unto the hills, and the Church, by appointing saints' days, invites us to lift up our eyes to the

saints. From them we may obtain help : first because they are our examples, then because they are our intercessors. In saying this, we do not forget that Christ is our great Example and Intercessor. But the very perfection of His life dazzles us, and we cannot escape the thought that He was not only sinless, but that he could not sin ; that He was not only Man but God. The saints, however, were like ourselves, poor, weak men and women, with the same trials and difficulties as ourselves, and with no greater helps than God offers to us. We see therefore in them what grace can enable men to do, what grace can cause men to become. The great difference between the saints and us is that they used the grace given them so much more faithfully than we do.

III. The saints are not only our examples but our intercessors. S. James tells us to *pray one for another*, and that *the supplication of a righteous man availeth much in its working* (S. James v. 16). Now the saints were certainly righteous men, therefore we lift up our eyes to them for help in the sense that we ask for their prayers. In the Creed we profess our belief in the Communion of Saints, and in the Collect for All Saints' Day the Church tells us that God hath knit together the elect "in one communion and fellowship;" and certainly the first and most elementary act of corporate life in that fellowship is prayer. In Heb. xii. 1, we are reminded that we are compassed about with a great cloud of witnesses (the saints of the O.T., mentioned in the preceding chapter). This implies their interest in the great struggle with the powers of evil in which we in the Church Militant are engaged. This interest is not merely academic but intensely personal, and manifests itself in the only practical way open to those in Heaven, in prayer for us.

SPIRITUAL SIGHT

“*Unto Thee do I lift up mine eyes, O Thou that sittest in the heavens.*”—PSALM CXXIII. 1.

THIS Psalm (the fourth of the Graduals) marks a distinct advance in spiritual apprehension. The Psalmist no longer lifts up his eyes unto the hills, which shine with the reflected light of the rising sun, but he lifts them up to the sun itself, to the Sun of Righteousness, to God Himself.

I. *Unto Thee do I lift up mine eyes.* We ought to be very thankful if we can say this ; for it is a sign that we have spiritual eyes, eyes of the soul ; whereas many, perhaps most of those around us in the world, are in various degrees of blindness : seeing, indeed, the things of this world which delight their physical sight, but knowing little or nothing of those glories of Heaven which can only be spiritually discerned. S. Paul says, *The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God : for they are foolishness unto him ; and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually judged* (I Cor. ii. 14).

II. Physical sight needs cultivation. Persons who squint badly generally acquire the habit of using only one eye, and for want of exercise the sight of the other becomes greatly impaired. How much more is this the case with spiritual sight. If we do not use the eyes of our soul they become atrophied. We may say that we have two eyes : that of the body and that of the soul. If we become too intent on using the eye of the body, too deeply interested in the sights of this world, for lack of use the eye of the soul may remain undeveloped, and so we may gradually lose the power of spiritual vision. Physiologists tell us that the embryo oyster has eyes, but as it has no occasion to use them they waste away. We know that the fish in the Kentucky caves, and elsewhere, are sightless because they have never come in contact with light. So is it with the eyes of the soul. To lift them up to God implies effort—continuous effort ; and if we do not make the effort, they deteriorate, lose the power of sight, and gradually become atrophied.

III. *Behold, as the eyes of servants (look) unto the hand of their master . . . so our eyes look unto the Lord our God.* God is the light of the soul ; and if we do not come in frequent contact with that light, the organ of spiritual sight cannot be developed. Hence the importance of prayer ; for it is in prayer chiefly that we lift up our eyes unto God. *As the eyes of servants*, of course this means slaves. The Apostle wrote, *Paul a bond-slave of Jesus Christ* that he might express perhaps two things—the love of Christ which so possessed him as to cause him to give himself absolutely to the service of his Master, and that devotion to God's will which involved the entire surrender of his own will. *Unto the hand of their master.* What is here signified by "the hand"? Surely the Hand of God as manifested in all His works. We must therefore study those works. First, in the wonders of nature, then, in the mysteries of grace, but, especially, in the workings of God's Providence in our own lives. How do we accept His rule? In sorrow and affliction, in poverty and hardship, are we patient? Are we lovingly submissive, remembering that *whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth* (Heb. xii. 6)? The eyes of God's servants should be upon their Master's Hand in obedience and in hope. In obedience—*Thy will be done* ; in hope—*until He have mercy upon us* (v. 2). For it is God's purpose to have mercy upon us ; since it is God's property ever to have mercy and to forgive.

SOWINGS FOR THE GREAT HARVEST

"They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. Though he goeth on his way weeping, bearing forth the seed ; He shall come again with joy, bringing his sheaves with him."—
PSALM CXXVI. 5, 6.

THIS is the seventh of the Gradual Psalms. In H.S. the number seven signifies perfection ; and this Psalm expresses the perfection of joy at deliverance from captivity, both from subjugation to an earthly tyrant, and that worse captivity, the bondage to a spiritual foe through sin.

I. The historical reference to these words is doubtless to be found in Ezra iii. 12, 13. The foundation of the second temple, there recorded, was laid in tears, and yet what a glorious harvest it produced. The vicissitudes of the nation were tremendous, as we read in the Books of Maccabees. They sowed in tears, those faithful exiles, and others watered with their tears what they had sowed ; for the sorrows of the people were great before they brought forth the Messiah. But then came the glorious harvest, when He came Who was the Prince of Peace. In Him we see how the fruit of that sowing in tears has blessed the world, and it shall endure for eternity.

The seed produces *first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear* (S. Mark iv. 28). The corn of wheat is gathered into the garner, while the husks and straw are trodden under foot. So was it with Jerusalem. The returning exiles sowed in tears, watched and prayed, toiled and worked, and endured with a heroism at which the world wondered, until the Messiah came, and their work was crowned with glory.

II. *They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.* These words would appeal to an agricultural people, like the Jews ; for the work of sowing is always a work of toil and sorrow. There is the laborious preparation of the fallow ground : the ploughing and harrowing and manuring. Then, too, there is always the uncertainty of the sowing, the uncertainty, that is, of what the seed will bring forth. So much depends on matters not within our power to control : on

the weather, whether we shall have rain or drought, on the temperature, whether we shall experience heat or cold ; on storms, and circumstances of every kind. All sowing must therefore be more or less in tears. And, similarly, reaping is ever accompanied by joy. For then the harvest is certain. It may be a large harvest, or it may be small, but it is secure.

III. This is true of all sowings in this life, that they must be with tears in this world that they may bring forth a harvest both in this life and in the life to come. There are many such sowings, let us turn our attention to one, the sowing of penitence. How bitter it is, and with what tears ! The deep ploughing up of our nature, and the sowing in the furrows thus made the good seed of true contrition. He that sows this seed shall indeed reap a joyful harvest. And the fruits of penitence are wonderful, not only in their sweetness but in the quickness of their growth. Calvary was the mount of penitence. Around our Lord's Cross we find three penitents sowing in bitter tears, who were soon to reap in exultant joy. Mary Magdalene stood at the foot of the Cross weeping, but three days later hailed her Master risen from the dead and for ever beyond the reach of suffering. S. Peter, not at the very foot of the Cross, but perhaps among one of the groups that stood afar off, on Easter Day beheld his Master and heard His words of pardon. The penitent robber, who had not to wait three days, but that very day was with Christ in Paradise. The joys of penitence ! Who can adequately describe them, and who in describing could ever exhaust them ? Read the lives of the saints, and you will learn of the harvest of joy which those reap who sow in tears.

THE VANITY OF HUMAN EFFORT APART FROM GOD

“Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it : Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.”—PSALM CXXVII. 1.

I. PSALM CXXV. begins, *They that trust in the Lord are as mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abideth for ever.* This Psalm is the converse of that ; for it tells us that they that put their trust in themselves will meet with disappointment, for work done without God’s blessing can only end in failure. We have here brought before us four great works in which men engage : the building of a house, the keeping of a city, the making of a fortune, and the founding of a family. All these are in God’s hands. Let us glance at the first two.

II. *Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it.* Here we have brought before us the work of building. We need not confine this to the building of a dwelling-house, for we are all builders more or less, architects of our own character and fame. In this work of building, many of us toil with all our might, but our labour is but lost, since God is not building with us. And this comes either because in our work we have not sought God’s co-operation, or perhaps because the very work we are striving to do is displeasing to God, and contrary to His holy will.

If, as many think, this Psalm refers to the building of the temple, how truly did God build with David and Solomon ! The place was chosen of God—Araunah’s threshing-floor. The gathering of material, and the preparation for building made by David were under God’s guidance, as was also the actual work of its erection by Solomon. And how wonderful was its history ! How perfect its fulfilment of the purpose for which it was built ! to enshrine God’s Presence in the Holy of Holies until, in the fulness of time, the veil of that temple should be rent, in token that a new and living way of access to God in the worship of His Church had been made for man.

III. *Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.* The strongest walls, the most vigilant sentinels, are useless when God's protection is withdrawn. For the history of Jerusalem shows us how the weakest cities have been delivered by God's aid from overwhelming forces, as in the siege by Sennacherib; and that without His succour even the strongest are helpless, as in the assault of Nebuchadnezzar. Surely we may find an application of this to our own day in our duties and responsibilities as citizens; for if we may take the first part of the verse of man's work as an individual in building, so we may take the second part of his work as a citizen, keeping from evil the place where he dwells, and the society of which he is a member. In our days, when political liberty is the inheritance of all, there goes with it a responsibility which did not exist for the individual in ancient times. Then a city had to be defended from besiegers from without, now it has to be protected from those who for their own selfish ends strive to corrupt it from within. In dealing with political reformatations, we must remember that we cannot make a body corporate better in moral tone than the individual members of that body; so that all real political reformation must begin with the improvement of the citizens themselves. We must have God on our side in political life as well as in home life, if our cities and country are to be prosperous and virtuous.

IV. How earnestly we should seek God's help and guidance in all our works, whether in the upbuilding of our own fortune and character, or in our efforts for the well-being of our country and of our fellow-citizens.

UNSELFISHNESS IN WORK FOR GOD

"Lord, remember for David all his affliction; how he swear unto the Lord, etc."—Psalm cxxxii. 1-5.

AMONG critics there is no agreement as to the authorship or date of this Psalm, whether it was written by David, or Solomon, or a Jew of the time of Hezekiah or Josiah, or of the Captivity, or of the Return. But whoever wrote it, it is clear that the subject of the Psalm is David's toils and cares in preparing for the building of God's House. It is therefore most appropriate as a prayer for all builders for God. It falls into three divisions :

- i. The Preparation for the work (vv. 1-7).
- ii. The Prayer for God's blessing on it (8-10).
- iii. God's Answer to the prayer (11-18).

I. *Lord, remember for David all his affliction.* This brings before us the touching picture of the aged King setting himself to his last work for God. When *the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies round about . . . the King said . . . See now, I dwell in an house of cedar, but the Ark of God dwelleth within curtains* (II Sam. vii. 1, 2). He was an old man, worn with toil and struggle; but the rest he had so well earned he refuses to take. He resolves to consecrate to God his leisure, as he had his active days; his old age, as his youth. He determines to start a work he can never expect to see finished, and is even glad to gather materials for others to use. He will put his own comfort second; God's service, the noblest name for duty, first. This picture should rebuke the slothfulness and languid service of God which puts our own comfort first, and leads men to give to God only the superfluity of their time and means. Surely, it brings a message to those whose lives are being frittered away in idleness or self-indulgence.

II. *Lord remember. . . The Lord hath sworn unto David, etc.* (vv. 11-18). David saw no fruits of his toil. It was reserved for another to use what he had gathered. But God remembered David, and blessed abundantly his work. How many of us receive unfinished tasks, and transmit them to others. We are but one in the long line

who pass the work from hand to hand ; each contributing his little share. *One soweth, and another reapeth*, is the law of work, but there is a joy in work for God of which all are partakers together. The great lesson here taught is that of unselfishness in work for God. What does it matter what our part is ? whether to dig the foundation, or to lay the last stone ? The great thing is always to have some work. If we could invariably see the issue of our work it would either overwhelm us with disappointment, or worse—perhaps ensnare us by its success.

III. If the Jew could appeal to God for David's sake, how much more may we plead our cause in the Name of David's Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. *Lord, remember for David all his afflictions.* "By Thine Agony and bloody Sweat, by Thy Cross and Passion, by Thy Precious Death and Burial, Good Lord, deliver us." And then Christ's purpose, as foreshadowed in vv. 3-5. The Eternal Word came down to earth, and gave Himself no rest till He had made, in the hearts and bodies of men, a Temple for the Holy Ghost, till He had founded the Church Militant on earth. For that Church and the spread of its dominion, how gladly should we work in youth, and manhood, and old age. The issues of our work we shall find in eternity, in that Day when, the scaffold taken down, the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of Heaven from God, shall be revealed. Then shall we rest from our labours, for our works follow with us, where, nevertheless, *they have no rest day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God, the Almighty, Which was, and Which is, and Which is to come* (cf. Rev. xxi. 2 ; xiv. 13 ; iv. 8).

THE DUTY OF PRAISE

“ Behold, bless ye the Lord, all ye servants of the Lord, which by night stand in the house of the Lord. Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, and bless ye the Lord. The Lord bless thee out of Zion ; even He that made heaven and earth.”
—Psalm cxxxiv.

WITH one exception (Psalm cxvii.), this is the shortest Psalm in the Psalter. It is short, but very sweet; for it treats of that praise of God which is at once man’s highest privilege and duty; and which, beginning in the Church on earth, continues throughout eternity in the Church in Heaven. It is the last of the Graduals, and rightly ends with blessing. In the Offices of the Church this has always formed the last Psalm of Compline. Those who look upon it as composed for the use of pilgrims regard it as their leave-taking of the temple before their departure homeward. While the night still lingers, they are on the move ; and passing the temple gates they see the guards upon the walls, and chant a farewell to the priests and Levites, whose work it is by day and night to serve in God’s house. The priests reply with the benediction in the last verse, *The Lord bless thee out of Zion*. And with this benediction resting on them, the pilgrims take their homeward way.

I. *Behold, bless ye the Lord*. The preceding Psalm treated of love of our neighbour, as manifested by those who dwell together in unity. This Psalm tells of the love of God, as expressed in praise and thanksgiving. The one proclaims the goodness of unity, the other the joy of praise. The first word—“ Behold ”—calls attention to an important duty, as in the preceding Psalm it reminded us of a great truth. But what are we to behold ? Surely this is an exhortation to behold all the works of the Lord, all the marvels of creation ; to consider His greatness and goodness as manifested in the world, and especially in our own lives. For such contemplation must lead us to praise God, and to call upon all creation to join us in this work—to sing our Benedicite, “ *O all ye works of the Lord : praise Him, and magnify Him for ever.*”

II. *The Lord bless thee out of Zion.* The first verse calls upon us to bless God, the last tells us of the reward attached to the fulfilment of this duty—that God will bless us. For it is those with thankful hearts who recognize God's goodness, and show forth His praise, that receive God's blessing upon their lives and works. We are to bless God, that God may bless us. The word "bless," however, has a very different meaning when used of God and of man. When we are called upon to bless God, it means to praise Him in word and deed. But when God blesses us, it implies, of course, the bestowal upon us of God's gifts of grace, and of material prosperity.

III. When are we to praise Him? By night. In the Psalm this refers to those priests and Levites whose duty it is to watch in the temple by night. For us it may be taken of the night of this life in which we are being trained for the day of eternity. But may we not also regard it as bringing before us the special duty of praise at night? When we retire to rest, the day has passed with its toils and temptations and blessings. These should be reviewed in a brief self-examination, and pardon should be asked for the sins of omission and commission of which our conscience accuses us. But, after that, how earnestly we should thank God for the blessings of the day—preservation from danger; victory over temptation, if any has been won; strength for the work of the day; and a prayer for God's blessing on it. Then, if we should be wakeful in the night, how joyously should we use the opportunity to join the saints and angels in their praises in Heaven, where they rest not night nor day.

THE GOODNESS AND MERCY OF GOD

"O give thanks unto the Lord; for He is good. . . . Who remembered us in our low estate: for His mercy endureth for ever."—Psalm cxxxvi. 1, 23.

PSALMS CXXXV and CXXXVI, which immediately follow the Graduals, are closely allied in structure, and in their purpose—the praise of Jehovah. In the former Jehovah is chiefly praised for His greatness; in the latter, for His love, especially as manifested in goodness and mercy. Hence the refrain or chorus with which each verse ends—*For His mercy endureth (or is) for ever*. The Psalm opens with a threefold praise of the Triune God (vv. 1-3). Then comes an ascription of praise to God for His mercy as seen in Creation (vv. 4-9). This is followed by thanksgiving for His mercy in the deliverance from Egypt (vv. 10-15). Then for guiding His people through the wilderness, and bringing them into the possession of Canaan (16-22). Lastly, for His personal mercies, and for His provision for the needs of all His creatures (vv. 23-26).

I. God's mercy as manifested in Creation. We may regard this as it affects us. The creatures were made to minister to our needs, and hence to reveal to us God's love. The earth to be our abode; the waters to afford a ready means of intercourse with one another, and for the exchange of commerce, by which each nation ministers reciprocally to the wants of the other. The sun, moon, and stars not only give us light, but they regulate the seasons of the year with regard to seed-time and harvest; and they control the tides of the ocean, which are so necessary to our well-being, and they enable us to steer our way across the pathless seas. Lastly, God provides food for man and beast.

II. God's mercy is manifested in Divine retribution. The deliverance of Israel from bondage, and the punishment of their oppressors was an example, for all time, that God cares for the happiness of His children, and intervenes by striking judgments for the relief of the oppressed and for the punishment of those who abuse their power. Without

such interference God would seem to be indifferent to sin. We have just had an impressive lesson with regard to this in the complete overthrow of the great nation that, in its lust to dominate the world, indulged in every cruelty, and trampled on the rights of all weaker peoples.

III. God's mercy as manifested in compassion for His creatures in their low estate. There are three impressive instances of this in the history of God's dealings with His Church.

i. The deliverance from the bondage of Egypt. How low was the estate of the Israelites when God sent Moses to lead them out of Egypt that they might become His instrument for preparing the world for the Incarnation !

ii. The return of the people from the captivity in Babylon, to which they had been subjected as a punishment for their persistent rebellion and idolatry. The effects of that discipline are evident in their entire freedom from idolatry, and in their devotion to their religion during the Maccabean period.

iii. The supreme instance was the Incarnation. Never was the world more wicked or its darkness more profound than when, in the fulness of time, Christ came to give light to them that sat in darkness and the shadow of death, and to guide their feet into the way of peace. Great had been God's goodness and mercy to man from the first day of his creation, but it culminated in the Incarnation, the effects of which will endure for ever, not only as long as the world shall last, but throughout the ages of eternity. For it, and for all God's mercies, we should praise Him and give Him thanks every day of our lives.

THE EXILES' LAMENT

"By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. Upon the willows in the midst thereof we hanged up our harps. For there they that led us captive required of us songs . . . saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?"—Psalm cxxxvii. 1-4.

THIS inspired threnody is one of the most touching poems in existence. The exiles' lament in a strange land. It refers, of course, to the captivity in Babylon; and was written either by one of the exiles there, or, as a reminiscence of his captivity, by one who had returned to Jerusalem with Ezra. For the Christian it is a song of sorrow, expressive of the painful experiences of his exile here.

I. There are three explanations of the demand to hear the songs of Zion.

i. Curiosity.

ii. Mockery, as Samson was called upon to make sport in the temple of Dagon (Judg. xvi. 25).

iii. Kindly meant advice to the exiles to reconcile themselves to their inevitable lot, and to ameliorate it by taking part in the social life of their foreign home. This last is undoubtedly the motive of the request. We find its counterpart in the world's solicitation of Christians to-day, and indeed in all ages. Citizens of Heaven, it would persuade them to unite the praise of God with the full enjoyment of earthly and carnal habits of life, that is, not to give up their religion altogether, but to combine it with entire acceptance of the world's social code, and even to use it as "a cloke of covetousness." How many sing the songs of Zion, apparently, with zeal and delight, who seem to have forgotten the warnings of the Gospel against worldliness, and the condemnation, by our Lord, of those who attempt to serve God and Mammon.

II. With these are contrasted the true citizens of Heaven, who refuse to prostitute the songs of Zion to the mirth and revelry of the world. Realizing that they are strangers and pilgrims here, they decline to entangle themselves in

the nets spread so cunningly for the children of God. As exiles in Babylon they sit by its waters, symbolic of those things belonging to "the city of confusion" (Heb. Babylon), which are so dear to the worldly heart, but so soon pass away. They weep for the sins which impair the Church's influence, and they mourn over the sad spectacle of some of her children who, forgetting their glorious inheritance, give themselves up to the seductions of worldliness. They hang their harps upon the willows. They do not put them out of sight, or destroy them altogether; but hang them within reach, ready, when God's good time shall come, to take them down, and to tune them for use in the true Jerusalem to accompany its celestial songs. *And I saw as it were a glassy sea mingled with fire; and them that come victorious from the beast, and from his image, and from the number of his name, standing by the glassy sea, having harps of God. And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are Thy works, O Lord God, the Almighty; righteous and true are Thy ways, Thou King of the ages* (Rev. xv. 2, 3).

III. How much needed is the lesson! Those who habitually dwell in an irreligious atmosphere cannot sing the Lord's song. The words would be incongruous, and the melody would ring false. Christ said of His disciples, I pray not that Thou shouldest take them from the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil one (S. John xvii. 15). While in the world our thoughts must be, where our heart is, in Heaven; and we, like the wise virgins, must be awaiting the summons, Behold the Bridegroom! Come ye forth to meet Him (S. Matt. xxv. 6), waiting with our lamps burning, and our harps prepared to take our place in the great palm procession, and our part in the song of the Lamb.

MY LIFE IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD

“O Lord, Thou hast searched me, and known me. . . . Search me, O God, and know my heart : Try me, and know my thoughts : And see if there be any way of wickedness in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”—Psalm cxxxix. 1, 23, 24.

THE intensely personal character of God’s Omniscience is the chief thought of this Psalm. It is not that God knows all things, and therefore knows *Me* ; but that I am as entirely present to Him, and the object of His care, as if there were no other creature in this world. This is the great Psalm of self-examination. If we are to know ourselves, we must examine our hearts and lives, not in the light of our own self-love, but with the candle of the Lord, in the light of the Holy Ghost. The woman who lost her silver piece *began* her search for it by lighting a candle; and *then* she swept diligently till she found it (S. Luke xv. 8). We must ask God to help us both to know our sins, and to recover the virtues and gifts that we have lost.

I. Consider the character of God’s knowledge of us, as revealed in this Psalm. *Thou understandest my thought afar off* (v. 2).

i. Those thoughts which are ever coursing through my busy mind; those desires which so deeply influence my life; those motives which, in God’s sight, determine the value of each action, the unworthy motives which rob even my best deeds of their merit.

ii. *There is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, Thou knowest it altogether* (v. 4). Read S. James iii. in connection with this verse.

iii. *Thou searchest out my path* (v. 3). All my actions, all my wanderings from Thy way, all that I have left undone in the path of duty. Thou, O Lord, knowest all ; and one day I also shall know, when the books are opened, and the dead are judged out of the things written therein (Rev. xx. 12).

II. With the thought of God’s Omniscience is associ-

ated His Omnipresence (cf. vv. 7-12). He knows all things because He is everywhere. Go where he will, man cannot escape from the presence of God. This adds to the awful guilt and shamelessness of sin, that it is committed in the very presence of God. The realization of this ought to be a great deterrent from sin. *How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?* (Gen. xxxix. 9).

III. *Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any way of wickedness in me, and lead me in the way everlasting* (23, 24). The Psalm ends with this beautiful prayer. We may note:

i. The intense sincerity of the suppliant. He realizes fully that it is impossible for him to hide any sin from God; nor has he any desire to do this; since sin, in order that it may be forgiven, must be discovered. His great anxiety therefore is that nothing shall be left to be brought to light in the Day of Judgment. He says, *Thou hast searched me* (v. 1); but search me again, more and more; try me in every way, that there may be no way of wickedness left in me to displease Thee. So, after David's confession of his grievous sin, and Nathan's assurance of God's forgiveness, he prayed in his deep penitence, Wash me *thoroughly* from my sin (Vulg. *Amplius lava me*). Wash me more and more (Psalm li. 2). The penitent's great solicitude is that no sin shall remain hidden, that all shall be brought to light, and forgiven. Therefore, knowing the deceitfulness of his own heart, and fearing lest some sin should have escaped him, the Psalmist implores God to search *thoroughly*, to test him in every way, that everything that holds him back from God may be removed.

ii. The final petition has regard to the future, that God, having helped him to discover his sin, and to confess it, will now lead him in the way everlasting. Forgiveness of the past is not enough, he asks for strength and guidance, that he may never again stray from the right path, but may attain to that way which is everlasting.

THE INCENSE OF PRAYER

*“ Let my prayer be set forth in Thy sight as the incense : and let the lifting up of my hands be an evening sacrifice.”—*Psalm cxli. 2.

THIS verse seems to indicate that the suppliant was temporarily deprived of the privilege of the Temple worship; and, desiring to join in it spiritually, he calls to mind the incense ascending heavenward twice daily, and he asks that his prayer, like the incense, may be carried to the throne of grace. Incense is a type of prayer. It is therefore necessary, in order that we may make this petition intelligently, to consider carefully the composition, use, and significance of incense.

I. The composition of the sacred incense of the Law was expressly revealed to Moses. It was to consist of four ingredients—stacte, onycha, galbanum, and frankincense. It was to be used only in the services of the Temple; and, if anyone put it to any private or common use, he was to be cut off (or excommunicated) from his people (Exod. xxx. 34). The symbolism of the four ingredients of the incense has received a threefold interpretation.

i. Of the four kinds of petition enumerated by S. Paul—supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings (I S. Tim. ii. 1).

ii. Of the four elements—Frankincense, from its transparency, standing for the air; the coarser and opaque galbanum for earth; the dripping stacte for water; and the smoking onycha for fire. Thus we are taught that all creatures, whether in Heaven above, or in the earth beneath, or in the waters under the earth, are bound to pay their service of worship to Almighty God; and are to be used as instruments of praise (cf. *Benedicite omnia opera*).

II. The use of incense. It was offered morning and evening upon its own special golden altar in the Holy Place; at first, apparently, by the High Priest only, but in the second Temple by the ordinary priests also, who were chosen daily by lot for the office. In addition to

the burning of the incense as a separate act of worship, it was joined to all other oblations "of a sweet savour," as something which made them acceptable. We find this later in use in the Apocalypse, where the angel, standing at the altar with a golden censer, offers the incense with "the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne" (Rev. viii. 3).

The Psalmist also begs that his prayer may be set forth as the evening sacrifice (or oblation). This Minchah, or "meat-offering," consisting of fine flour mixed with oil and frankincense, together with salt, was added to the daily burnt-offering of a lamb, both morning and evening. The Minchah consisted of corn, the chief food of man, made by bruising and grinding into flour. This typified the sufferings of Christ, the Bread of Life, which fitted Him to be the offering for the sins of the world. The wheaten flour so made is pure white, symbolizing Christ's perfect holiness. Oil was poured upon it to denote His anointing by the Holy Ghost; frankincense to indicate His sweetness, acceptance, and Ascension; salt, because of His incorruptibility and preserving power.

III. The significance of incense. In its use in connection with the morning and evening sacrifice, and with all the oblations of a sweet savour, there is evidently something added by it which imparts to the offering a value that it does not intrinsically possess. Surely this typifies the merits of Christ, set forth in His perpetual intercession in Heaven. Thus, to the prayers of the saints the angel adds incense, with which they ascend before God. The intercession of Christ therefore imparts to them their efficacy. So, by ending our prayers with the oblation "through Jesus Christ our Lord," we add to them His merits, as the incense, to render them acceptable to God.

A MODEL PRAYER

"I cry with my voice unto the Lord; With my voice unto the Lord do I make supplication. I pour out my complaint before Him; I shew before Him my trouble."—Psalm cxlii. 1, 2.

THE title of this Psalm—"Maschil of David, when he was in the cave; a Prayer"—agrees well with its contents. For we are told of a place in which David was entirely shut up, so that he had no way of escape; that he was abandoned by his friends, and was almost in despair. His prayer is indeed a cry of anguish most touching in its plea of extreme misery. We are not informed where the cave was situated, whether at Adullam, or Engedi (I Sam. xxii. 1; xxiii. 29; xxiv. 3), or in some other of his lurking places. If, as seems probable, it were the first, the traditional site is a place so wild as to add to the horrors of his position. It has been described as an oppressive cavern, or series of vaults, having a fearful gorge below, gigantic cliffs above; and approached by a winding path along a narrow shelf of rock.

I. David's prayer. Its earnestness. It was a cry, a supplication, a complaint; and the repetition of the word "with my voice" tells of its insistency. Observe the intensely personal note of the prayer. Everything is in the first person singular—I cried with *my* voice; with *my* voice do *I* make supplication. It is from an overwhelming sense of need that David so urgently pleads with God. His trouble was unbearable. He could not endure it alone. He must tell someone. And therefore, most wisely, he takes it to God. The word "pour" expresses the overpowering character of his affliction. It wells forth from his heart, and, like a torrent, breaks through the barriers of silence. How many, when they are in trouble, pour out their grievance to their neighbours, who can do nothing to help them; and, by the bitterness with which they assail the author of their calamity, they frequently sin against charity.

II. David's sense of loneliness in his affliction. *Look*

on my right hand, and see ; for there is no man that knoweth me : Refuge hath failed me ; no man careth for my soul (v. 4). David had two trials. He was oppressed by foes, and he was forsaken by friends. The former is easier to endure than the latter. In the cave of Adullam he was not actually alone : four hundred were with him. Some of his brethren were there; but what was the character of the others? *Every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented*—a lawless mob. How little sympathy could there have been between such men and the man after God's own heart? Their only bond was a common danger. To a man of deep religious nature, like David, their association must have aggravated his personal woes. *In this loneliness, he tells us, I cried unto Thee, O Lord ; I said, Thou art my refuge, my portion in the land of the living.*

III. What a lesson to us !

i. In prayer. To bring our troubles before God, not to talk of them before others. To pour out our heart to God in fervent prayer, telling Him of the burden of trial which overwhelms us, and pleading with Him for deliverance, if it be His will; or for grace to bear them, if it be for our good.

ii. When forsaken or misunderstood by friends, to find refuge in the arms of our Heavenly Father; to find consolation in the thought that, when men cast us out, God is still our portion, now and in eternity. To make acts of faith in God's power and goodness; acts of hope in His mercy in dealing with us—*For Thou shalt deal bountifully with me (v. 7)*; acts of love to Him as our Heavenly Father.

CHRIST IN HIS PASSION

"I cry with My voice unto the Lord; with My voice unto the Lord do I make supplication. I pour out My complaint before Him; I shew before Him My trouble."—Psalm cxlii. 1-9.

S. AUGUSTINE, the first of the great writers on the Psalter, sees Christ speaking everywhere through the mouth of David. Without going quite so far as this, we cannot fail to recognise it in many utterances (especially in the Passion Psalms), which, inspired by the Holy Ghost, are prophecies of our Lord's Passion; and in their form anticipate the very words of Christ. This Psalm is a good example of these, and has been thus interpreted by nearly all the great commentators. Let us then consider it as descriptive of Christ's Passion.

I. S. Hilary says, "the *voice* first utters its cry of pain; then this cry is shaped by faith and longing into a *supplication*; thirdly, it does not come merely from the lips, but is *poured out* from the deep fountain of the heart; next, it is *before Him*, not carelessly, but with the reverence due to God's presence; lastly, it is trouble which He shows to God as His One Defence and Refuge in time of need." S. Augustine adds, "That prayer which the Son of God poured out did not sink into the ground, trying to bury itself, but rose as a pure and sparkling fountain to the height of Divine love." Our prayer should be a fountain, too, fed by those four springs of mercy, grace, wisdom, and love, which rise from the wounds of Christ's hands and feet; while He gives Himself the Fount of Life from the wound of His heart, whence flowed the twin sacraments of the Church. And this word "poured out" teaches us that in prayer we should not try to keep anything back from God, but should show Him all that is in our hearts."

II. *When My spirit was overwhelmed within Me*, etc. (v. 3). These words tell of the Agony followed by the Betrayal. His spirit was in heaviness when He said, *My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death*. His Father knew His path, and there appeared an angel from Heaven

strengthening Him. It was then that "Judas, who knew the place," hid a snare for Him, giving a sign—*Whomsoever I shall kiss, that is He : take Him* (S. Matt. xxvi. 38, 48; S. Luke xxii. 43; S. John xviii. 1). Look on My right hand, and see; *for there is no man that knoweth Me* (v. 4). Then all the disciples "*forsook Him and fled,*" and Peter "*began to curse and to swear, saying, I know not this man of whom ye speak.*" No man cared for His soul. Pilate had not the courage to abide by his first acquittal, and they all said, *Let Him be crucified.*

III. *I cried unto Thee, O Lord, etc.* (vv. 6-9). He cried indeed, and that "with a loud voice," when He said, *Father, into Thy hands I commend My Spirit.* And He claimed His *portion in the land of the living*, His rights, as the King's Son, over that good land, when He said to the penitent thief, *Verily . . . to-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise.* In this land of the dying, God is our *refuge*, but in the land very far off, when our eyes shall see the King in His beauty, He will be our *portion*. *Attend unto My cry ; for I am brought very low.* He was brought very low, when He humbled Himself, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was obedient unto the death of the Cross (Phil. ii. 7). *Deliver Me from My persecutors ; for they are stronger than I.* In perfect conformity with the Father's will, He asks deliverance at His Father's hands, which He would not achieve with His own. *Bring My soul out of prison . . . The righteous shall compass Me about.* This prayer may be taken as a petition for deliverance from this world of sin, and also for the promise of the Resurrection unto that glorious life where the righteous shall for ever be united to their Lord in the fellowship of the Church Triumphant.

WHAT CONSTITUTES HAPPINESS ?

"Happy is the people, that is in such a case: Yea, happy is the people, whose God is the Lord."—Psalm cxliv. 15.

THIS is largely a composite Psalm, the earlier part (vv. 1-11) taken from Psalms xviii., viii., and xxxiii. The latter part (vv. 12-15) is original, and depicts with great beauty the prosperity of an agricultural people. But all this leads up to the last verse, which is at once its culmination and its explanation. Nearly all the great commentators, from the time of S. Augustine, make a sharp division between the two clauses of this verse, as representing, and indeed contrasting, respectively temporal and eternal, corporal and spiritual happiness. This was doubtless occasioned by the Vulgate and LXX. rendering—"They called the people blessed"—in which the "they" of this clause seems to be "the ungodly"; and in contrast to it is set the opinion of the saints—"Yea, (rather) happy is the people, whose God is the Lord." We find the same thought in the Syriac version, which makes the first clause a question—"Are not the people blessed who are in such a case?" and they answer it as above.

I. Does temporal prosperity bring real happiness? Only when it is combined with godliness. Otherwise, it generally carries in its train many anxieties, and many serious temptations. For Christ Himself said, *How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to enter in through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God* (S. Luke xviii. 24, 25). S. Augustine asks the question—"Are these things happiness?" and replies: "Happiness it is, but of the left hand, because temporal, corporal, mortal. I would not have you flee it, nor yet think it to be the right hand. Men are not necessarily vain or wicked because they abound in such things, but because they set on the right hand that which ought to be on the left. . . . What ought they to have put on the right hand? God, eternity, the unfailing years of God. . . . If riches increase, set

not your heart upon them. I blame them not because their sons are like the young plants, etc. But I do blame them because they said that a people is happy which hath such things. But what sayest thou, O David? What, O Body of Christ, sayest Thou?—*Happy is the people, whose God is the Lord.*”

II. The happiness of a people whose God is the Lord. In Isa. xxxii. we have a description of such an ideal kingdom. It is a prophecy of the golden age which should follow the overthrow of Assyria. It was not then realized, but remains to be fulfilled in Christ’s kingdom. The key-stone of this happiness is righteousness. *Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment.* The fruits of this are foretold—*The work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and confidence for ever* (Isa. xxxii. 1, 17). There can be no true peace which is not based on righteousness. Those who are incapable of righteousness are incapable of the full blessing of peace.

III. The same law holds good in the spiritual life of the individual. There is nothing that can give assurance of peace, quietness and confidence if righteousness be not the ruling passion of the life. How clearly our Lord teaches this! *Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Seek ye first His kingdom, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you* (S. Matt. v. 6; vi. 33).

THE MANIFESTATION OF GOD'S POWER

"They shall speak of the glory of Thy kingdom, and talk of Thy power; To make known to the sons of men His mighty acts. . . . The Lord upholdeth all that fall, and raiseth up all those that be bowed down."—Psalm cxlv. 11-14.

THE glory of a kingdom is its power. The power of the great kingdoms of the past—of Assyria and of Babylon, of Persia and of Macedon, of Rome, etc.—has been manifested chiefly in adding to their territory and to the number of their subjects by encroachments on the rights of weaker nations, and by the absorption through conquest of smaller kingdoms. How unlike this has been the manifestation of God's kingdom, and the exercise of His power! Historians have written of the might of Alexander, of Attila, of Genghis Khan, of Timur, etc.—a story of conquest, oppression, and destruction. The saints speak of the glory of God's kingdom, and talk of His power, and make known His mighty acts. But how different! His kingdom is a kingdom of love, and His mighty acts (as instanced in this and the next Psalm, vv. 7-9) are acts of beneficence and of mercy.

I. *The Lord upholdeth all that fall, and raiseth up all those that be bowed down* (v. 14). The first example of God's mighty acts, given here, is not destructive, but beneficent—tender pity and help for the weak. Two classes are brought before us—those who are falling (observe the present tense) and those that be bowed down. The former, God upholds by His grace, strengthening their weakness, and inspiring them with new hopes. *A bruised reed shall He not break, and the smoking flax shall He not quench* (Isa. xlii. 3; S. Matt. xii. 20). The latter, those who are bowed down, are they who are spiritually "tied and bound with the chain of their sins," or bowed down by ill-health, or by misfortune; like the *woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years; (who) was bowed together, and could in no wise lift herself up* (S. Luke xiii. 11). The gift of penitence, and the power of the

Precious Blood loose these, and raise them up. The tender pity of God upholdeth them.

II. *The eyes of all wait upon Thee ; and Thou givest them their meat in due season* (v. 15). The kings of the earth are fed at their subjects' cost. The King of Heaven feeds bountifully all His creatures. He is the Source of life and the Provider of sustenance for all—not only for man; but for beasts and birds and fishes, and even for the tiniest insect. The eyes of all wait upon Him. The prayer of all, as taught by His dear Son, is *Our Father, . . . give us this day our daily bread*. Not only the crowded poor of our great cities, but the teeming life of tropical regions receive their food at His hand.

III. *The Lord is righteous in all His ways, and gracious in all His works* (v. 17). All God's ways of dealing with His children are righteous. The afflictions and punishments with which He visits us are as much part of His righteousness as the greatest bounties He bestows upon us. Indeed, suffering is often God's best gift; for it is always accompanied by grace to enable us to bear it; and it is sent in love, to work in us some gracious purpose. *For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth* (Heb. xii. 6). And yet, *how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past tracing out* (Rom. xi. 33) ! The prosperity of the ungodly, the adversity of the righteous, the pains of innocent children, the vicarious suffering of parents for their children's sins, of subjects on account of the pride and ambition of their rulers—how mysterious, how unsearchable they are ! How unjust, if regarded only from without ! And yet, we believe that they are God's means of testing, and developing His elect, of building up in them saintly characters, of making them partakers in the fellowship of Christ's sufferings; *and we know that to them that love God all things work together for good* (Rom. viii. 28).

A LAW OF HARVEST

"He maketh peace in thy borders ; He filleth thee with the finest of the wheat."—Psalm cxlvii. 14.

THIS verse is a good illustration of a feature of Holy Scripture which is often overlooked—the close and logical sequence of thought underlying some of those concise and epigrammatic phrases found most frequently in the Psalter. The Psalm consists of a series of short sentences descriptive of the works of God. These seem to have no connection with one another, and yet, a careful examination shows that their relationship is sometimes very real. The most striking instances are seen in this verse and in verse 18 (cf. p. 300).

I. The two clauses of this verse are related to each other as cause to effect. The first is the cause of the second. Peace is an essential condition of an abundant harvest—the *finest of the wheat*. In war-time there can be but meagre harvests. This economic law has been manifested in most great wars; but never so clearly as in that through which we have lately passed. In all the countries engaged in the war, the spectre of famine has stalked abroad. The labourers whose work it should have been to manure, and plough, and sow the fields—instead of this, were fertilizing the battle-fields with their blood. Crops were sown and reaped by women and old men, but the harvest was in each succeeding year poorer in quality and more scanty in quantity. The attempt to relieve the shortage by import of grain from other lands afforded but temporary aid, and immensely raised the prices abroad by disorganizing the machinery of transportation, and thus carried the pressure of scarcity everywhere. While, in spite of rationing, the emaciated bodies of the inhabitants of the war zone emphasized the law of the connection between peace and harvest. The great lesson was brought home to everyone, that peace is the mainspring of prosperity, the source of plenty. We must, however, go back a step. Peace is the result of war. Nations now at peace won that peace on the battle-field after suffering and sacrifice ; and,

to preserve it, they are obliged to keep up armies, ever ready to defend their peace. Optimists look to a league of nations to render this unnecessary. There have been many leagues of nations in the past, but they have never succeeded in preserving peace for very long.

II. Like so many of the laws of nature, this is equally operative in the spiritual sphere. The harvest of the soul can only be possessed and enjoyed, in its fulness, when peace reigns in us. *The finest of the wheat* is the body and blood of Jesus Christ, given to be our food in the Sacrament of the Altar. That corn of wheat had to fall into the ground and die, that it might rise again, and bring forth much fruit, the fruit of His risen body, the Bread of Life. This must, however, be preceded by a campaign against the powers of evil, within and without, which threaten our soul's peace. They are many. Not only enemies without but traitors within—our own evil desires and passions, which are so often in league with our spiritual foe.

III. We look for a peace which is the gift of God, a peace *which passeth all understanding*. It (like a sentinel) *shall guard your hearts and your thoughts*; for it is that peace of which Christ said, *My peace I give unto you* (Phil. iv. 7; S. John xiv. 27). And this peace which our Lord bestows was the fruit of war and of victory—of the struggle of His Agony and Passion, of His Death and Resurrection. He says, *In Me ye may have peace* (S. John xvi. 33). It is only by living union with Christ that we can have this peace for our very own. That union is effected first through baptism; it is cemented, and rendered closer, by each communion; and its fruit is the perfect peace of God, which, so long as we abide in Christ, neither the world nor the devil can ever destroy.

THE EVERLASTING HALLELUJAH

"Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord."—Psalm cl. 6.

THE Psalter concludes with a striking group of Hallelujah Psalms (Ps. cxlvi-cl), in which we find a gradual crescendo culminating in this most noble Psalm, the fit ending of the inspired Treasury of Devotion of the Church. The great "*Book of the War Songs of the Prince of Peace*" begins with a beatitude—*Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsels of the wicked*. It sets forth the struggles and the victories of the spirit over the flesh, of the soldiers of the Lord over Satan and his hosts. With the promise of beatitude it leads the pilgrim along the way that tends towards the land of everlasting happiness and praise. The first three Books of the Psalter close with *Amen, Amen*; denoting man's perseverance in prayer, and firm confidence in God. The fourth Book, with its foretaste of glory, blends the song of Moses and of the Lamb, and ends with *Amen, Alleluia*. But the fifth, wherein wars have ceased for ever, terminates in that song of Heaven which alone has no termination. As it is written, *After these things I heard as it were a great voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, Hallelujah; Salvation, and glory, and power, belong to our God; for true and righteous are his judgments. . . . And a second time they say, Hallelujah. . . . And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunders, saying, Hallelujah: for the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigneth* (Rev. xix. 1, 2, 3, 6).

I. *Praise God in His sanctuary* (v. 1). Many have been the interpretations suggested for "*sanctuary*." In its widest sense it has been taken of the great Temple of Creation—Heaven and earth which should ever resound with God's praise. Some, however, have seen in it the Temple at Jerusalem with its daily services. Others, for men, understand it of the Church Militant here in earth; and for angels, the Courts of Heaven. Others, again, of our bodies which are the Temple of the Holy Ghost,

a shrine more beautiful and wonderful than any mortal architect ever has reared. The Vulgate, following the LXX, renders it "in His saints." The Psalm summons us to make the praise of Jehovah the prevailing occupation of our life. First, in the sanctuary, but there only in order that praise may be offered elsewhere, and everywhere. And, if on the Lord's Day, then also on every day.

II. *Praise Him for His mighty acts: Praise Him according to His excellent greatness* (v. 2). Here we have the two great subjects for praise—God's inherent power, and its manifestation in mighty acts. Under this would come His work of Creation, of Preservation, and of Redemption. But more than this, that which is behind that power—His goodness. *The earth is full of the goodness* (loving-kindness) *of the Lord* (Ps. xxxiii. 5).

Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet, etc. (vv. 3-5). Instruments of music are congruous to the image of praise in the sanctuary, but they are only representative of all God's creatures, which, in the great sanctuary of nature, are called upon to praise Him. This is the idea so admirably set forth in the Church's canticle, *Benedicite, omnia opera*. The creatures praise God by fulfilling the purpose of their creation, especially in ministering to the needs of man. In this way they elicit from man praise of God for His goodness in so bountifully providing for them. The instruments of music are themselves dumb, as are all musical instruments; but they respond to man's touch, and through him utter God's praises. Such is the idea of Gottschalk's Alleluiatic Sequence, which after calling upon all creatures to praise God ends thus :

Now for all men be outpoured
Alleluia to the Lord ;
With alleluia evermore
The Son and Spirit we adore.
Praise be done to the Three in One.
Alleluia ! Alleluia ! Alleluia ! Alleluia.

PROPER PSALMS FOR CERTAIN DAYS

CHRISTMAS DAY	- - - -	Pages 242 to 250
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THE BIRTHDAY OF THE SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

"In them hath He set a tabernacle for the sun : which cometh forth as a bridegroom out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a giant (strong man) to run his course. It goeth forth from the uttermost part of the heaven, and runneth about unto the end of it again : and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof."
—PSALM xix. 5, 6.

FROM the time of S. Ambrose, these verses have been applied to our Lord's Incarnation ; and on this account the psalm has formed part of the Office for Christmas Day in the Gregorian and Ambrosian Breviaries, and in our Prayer Book.

I. It was on Christmas Day that Christ the Sun of Righteousness with healing in His wings (cf. Mal. iv. 2) came forth as a Bridegroom out of His chamber—the spotless tabernacle of the Virgin's womb. There he had espoused our humanity, which He joined to His Divine nature, that, as bride and bridegroom are made one flesh, so God and man might be united in One Divine Person. Then, the Day Spring from on high visited us ; and ever since has shone with His gracious beams upon those in darkness and the shadow of death, that He might guide them into the way of peace (cf. S. Luke i. 78, 79).

II. *And rejoiceth as a strong man to run his course.* This verse sets forth our Lord's life on earth, those wonderful three and thirty years during which He *went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil* (Acts x. 38). He found the strong man, fully armed, guarding his court, and his goods (the souls of men) in peace, the shameful peace of sinful bondage. He, the Stronger One, came to overcome the devil, and to set man free, though at the cost of His Cross and Passion. He came forth rejoicing ; since for the joy that was set before Him, joy in the salvation of man, He endured the Cross, despising the shame (cf. Heb. xii. 2).

Christ's work, however, was not only one of deliverance from the bondage of evil ; it was to guide men into the

way of peace. It was to teach them how to live in mutual fellowship and love, to substitute for the rigours of the law the delights of the beatitudes.

It goeth forth from the uttermost part of the heaven . . . and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof. How far-reaching is the influence of our Lord's life and work. None too poor or too rich, none too young or too old, none too sorrowful or too happy, to be touched by His gracious words, to be reached by His beneficent deeds, to be helped by His holy example. The warmth of His love should thaw the coldest nature, and melt the hardest heart.

III. *It . . . runneth about unto the end of it again. I came out from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go unto the Father* (S. John xvi. 28). S. Gregory says, Because He Whom we love has now ascended into Heaven, therefore it is that our hearts burn within us, while we think of the glory that is His, and which is to be ours. Hence this psalm finds place in the Office for Ascension Day in the Gregorian Breviary.

Christ came into the world that He might be for us the Way. He left the world that we might follow in His footsteps. Now from His throne in Heaven He draws us to Him in heart and mind, in answer to our prayer—*Draw me : we will run after Thee* (Cant. i. 4).

How fitting is this Psalm for our worship to-day, teaching us, as it does, from one of the most glorious and beneficent of the phenomena of nature—the daily course of the sun—of the birth, and life, and Ascension of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

THE BRIDAL OF THE KING

"Thou art fairer than the children of men ; full of grace are Thy lips, because (therefore) God hath blessed Thee for ever."—PSALM xlv. 3.

THE Fathers of the Church with one accord see in this psalm a nuptial song concerning the Bridegroom and His Bride, concerning Christ and His Church—the Saviour and those to be saved. Of these nuptials, writes S. Jerome, the grace of God effected the union in the womb of the Virgin, when the Word was made Flesh, and man was united to the Divine Word. Then was His Spouse the Church joined with Christ, first in love, and afterwards in immortality. This tells us of the bridal day of the Church, and is the sweetest song, the most burning with love, of all the Psalter. It finds place in the Gregorian, Ambrosian, Monastic, and Anglican Offices for Christmas Day.

I. The King. This psalm begins with a description of the beauty and glory of the Bridegroom ; and the words with which it is introduced—*My heart overfloweth (bubbles or boils) with goodly words (or matter). My tongue is the pen of a nimble scribe—expresses the deep feeling and burning love which the contemplation of the King inspires. And, first, the beauty of His person and character and His gracious words—Thou art fairer than the children of men ; full of grace are Thy lips.*

The Eastern doctors, taking the words of Isaiah (liii. 2) of the whole of Christ's life, deny that the Incarnate Word possessed external beauty. The greatest teachers of the West, on the other hand, especially S. Bernard, S. Anselm, and S. Thomas Aquinas, restrict that passage to our Lord's Passion, and break forth into rapturous praises of the beauty of the Son of God, as set forth under the guidance of the Holy Spirit in this psalm. But we may take it still more of the moral and spiritual beauty of the character of Christ, which, we may well believe, showed itself in His human face—*Fairer than the children of men.* The only one (except His dear Mother) whose life was unmarred

by any sin. But His was not only the negative beauty of innocence, His deeds and words reflect the positive glories of sanctity. The Holy One of God manifested in absolute perfection every virtue the mind can conceive—*Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity : wherefore God, even Thy God hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows.*

II. The Queen. Upon Thy right hand did stand the Queen in a vesture of gold, wrought about with divers colours. . . . So shall the King have pleasure in thy beauty (vv. 10, 11). The love of Christ for His Church—He gave Himself up for it ; that He might sanctify it, having cleansed it by the washing of water with the word, that He might present the Church to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing ; but that it should be holy and without blemish (Eph. v. 25-27). This is not the description of the Church as seen in this world with good and evil mingled, as in the parables of The Tares and The Draw-net ; but in eternity, as pictured by S. John in the vision of the Heavenly Jerusalem (cf. Rev. xxi., xxii. 5).

III. We as members of Christ's Church, and therefore objects of His love, must strive, so far as in us lies, to purify ourselves, and to develop in us the virtues pleasing to Him ; that in us He may see of the travail of His soul, and be satisfied (cf. Isa. liii. 11), that we may be clad in beautiful garments, the wedding garment of His righteousness, imputed to us in our justification, imparted to us in the Sacraments, and woven into the very fibre of our character by the operation of the Holy Ghost in sanctifying us.

THE GLORIES OF THE KING'S DAUGHTER

"The King's daughter is all glorious within: her clothing is of wrought gold. She shall be brought unto the King in raiment of needlework."—PSALM xlv. 14, 15.

WHO is this King's daughter? The bride of the heavenly bridegroom, the wife of the Lamb (cf. Rev. xxi. 9). She is, first, in its fullest application, the Church; and then, in a very real sense, each soul that is a member of that Church. She is a king's daughter because the King, Who made a marriage for His Son, calls the bride of that Son His daughter. Let us, to-day, consider this passage in its secondary meaning, as setting before us the relation of the soul to Christ.

I. The bride of Christ. There is a mystical union between Christ and the faithful soul, which is the special joy of the spiritual life. The laws of its growth, and the means by which that may be developed and perfected, should be objects of intense interest to every Christian. There are many devotional treatises on the subject which may be read with profit, but the source of them all is the revelation of Holy Scripture, especially The Psalms and The Song of Songs. There, under many figures and similes, we may learn much of the sweet intercourse of the soul with Jesus, and of the virtues and dispositions which must be cultivated in order that we may be pleasing to our Lord, and may experience the higher degrees of fellowship with Him.

II. *The King's daughter is all glorious within.* The majority of commentators consider that the "within" means "within the palace," as contrasted with her public appearances. Her glories therefore are those of the life hid with Christ in God (cf. Col. iii. 3), glories to be seen of God but not of men. The Bride's whole desire is to be pleasing in the sight of her Lord, she has no wish to win the admiration of the world. Christ warns us of the futility of external religious observances, which have for their motive—*to be seen of men* (cf. S. Matt. vi. 5, 16). Others, however, take "within" of the interior graces of the Bride, that the

inward virtues and endowments of character are, in the sight of Christ, the greatest glories of His Bride. The great aim and purpose of our life must be to cultivate the garden of the soul that, like the Spouse in the Canticles, we may be able to say to our Lord, especially at the time of Communion, *Let my Beloved come into His garden, and eat His precious fruits* (Cant. iv. 16).

III. Her clothing is of wrought gold (inwrought with gold). Here we are reminded of the completeness and integrity of the soul that is united with Christ. Her hidden virtues, in which the King delights, are matched by an outward splendour befitting her lofty destiny. The bride of Christ must be all glorious within, but some rays of that glory will find their way out, and be manifested in her exterior life. *Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven* (S. Matt. v. 16). The light of virtue cannot long remain hid, it reveals itself in works of virtue, which, because they are the fruit of grace, form the wedding garment of the bride of Christ. S. Paul said, *I live; and yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me* (Gal. ii. 20). If Christ be in us, we shall indeed show forth in our outer life the graces of a Christian. A quaint writer of the 17th century, commenting on this text, remarks that the ark was pitched within and without (Gen. vi. 14). Such, he says, is the sincere man—within and without alike, inside and outside all one. *She shall be brought unto the King. Why brought?* All is from Him, grace must prevent as well as follow us. The bride in the Canticles prays *Draw me: we will run after Thee: The King hath brought me into His chambers* (Cant. i. 4). Our Lord said, *No man can come to Me, except the Father which sent Me draw him . . . and . . . I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Myself* (S. John vi. 44 ; xii. 32).

GOD'S SUPREME ACT OF MERCY

"My song shall be alway of the loving-kindness of the Lord: with my mouth will I ever be shewing thy truth from one generation to another. For I have said, Mercy shall be set up for ever: Thy truth shalt Thou stablish in the heavens."

—PSALM lxxxix. 1, 2.

Who is there that, looking back upon the long chain of blessings which link together the years of his life, cannot make these words his own? But, when we look away from ourselves, and think of the race to which we belong, there stand out two supreme manifestations of God's loving-kindness or mercy—the Creation of man and his salvation through the Incarnation.

Mercy was God's first expression of love to man. Creation was an act of mercy, the overflow of God's love upon His creatures, which called them into being; but the Incarnation was the supreme act of mercy, when God took into Himself that humanity which He had made, that He might share its sorrows, bear its sins, and lift it up to His very throne.

1. *But when the kindness of God our Saviour, and His love toward man, appeared . . . according to His mercy He saved us* (Tit. iii. 4, 5).

May we not regard these words as S. Paul's inspired application of our text—that the great act of God's kindness (or mercy, as in the psalm it should be translated) was His gift of His Only Begotten Son, that man might not perish, but have everlasting life (S. John iii. 16). *God's tender mercies are over all His works* (Ps. cxlv. 9). But throughout the O.T. there are certain great manifestations of mercy, which are like footsteps leading up to the crowning act, by which man was saved. Such were the salvation of Noah from the Flood, the Call of Abraham, the Exodus of the Israelites from the bondage of Egypt, the establishment of the kingdom to the seed of David of whom Christ should come, the deliverance from the Captivity of Babylon—all leading up to, and finding their consummation in, the Incarnation. Well, then, may the

song of praise and thanksgiving be repeated from year to year, and from generation to generation, telling of the loving-kindness of God in the Christmas Gift of His dear Son.

II. *For I have said, Mercy shall be set up (built up) for ever.*

This was precisely what was accomplished by the Passion of Christ, which not only delivered man from the bondage of sin, but by his incorporation into Christ built up in him, as the fruits of God's mercy, all that had been destroyed by the Fall ; and more, built up out of humanity itself, as with living stones, a spiritual house in this world, and in eternity the City of God, the heavenly Jerusalem (cf. I S. Pet. ii. 5 ; Rev. xxi.)

III. We give expression to our joy in the festivities, social and ecclesiastical, of Christmas. And this, indeed, is right. But surely the memory of God's great mercy to us should impel us, at this time, to acts of love to others, and especially to those of our brethren who are less prosperous than ourselves. It is not enough merely to contribute to Christmas funds for the relief of the poor, though this may be good. We should endeavour to seek out some individual to whom we may personally minister, in recognition of God's loving-kindness to us. Dives doubtless gave large sums in charity—most rich Pharisees did. But there was, lying at his door, a poor beggar, Lazarus, whose pitiable lot he knew, whose sufferings he saw, and yet whom he habitually passed by. Is there a Lazarus at our gates ? perhaps in our own family ? not needing, maybe, pecuniary help, but craving for a word of sympathy, of love, to brighten the gloom of a lonely life, to satisfy the longings of a hungry soul ? To minister to such an one would be a fitting act of Christmas kindness, and would bring to our own lives an added blessing.

MAN THE RESTING PLACE OF GOD

"Arise, O Lord, into Thy resting place : Thou, and the Ark of Thy strength."—PSALM CXXXII. 8.

THESE words were uttered by Solomon at the dedication of his temple (II Chron. vi. 41) ; and they are certainly most appropriate as a prayer of invocation, that God's presence may dwell in the church consecrated to His worship. But they have a special significance on Christmas Day, when was answered, in a truer and deeper sense, the prayer of humanity, that God would dwell among His people. For then, not in a temple made by human hands but in that wonderful temple, created by God Himself, the soul of man, God at last, in the fulness of time, found a resting place.

I. We are told of Noah's dove, that it was sent forth from the ark three times. The first time the dove returned, having found no resting place for the sole of her foot (cf. Gen. viii. 9). The second time she brought back an olive leaf plucked off. And the third time she returned no more, having found a resting place on the renewed earth. The dove is a type of the Holy Ghost : and her three missions typify the three missions of the Holy Ghost. First, to the ancient world, when the Holy Spirit operated on man from without, finding as yet no dwelling place in his soul. Then, at the Annunciation, there was at last found, in the B.V. Mary, humanity's solitary flower, one who in faith and purity was a fit instrument of the Incarnation. The Holy Ghost overshadowed her, and by His operation took from her substance that body which was hypostatically united to God the Word ; and from this moment the tabernacle of God was with men (cf. Rev. xxi. 3). The return of the dove with the olive leaf, the emblem of peace, symbolized this. Finally, the third mission at Pentecost consummated the work of the Holy Ghost, when He came down upon the Church to abide with her for ever (S. John xiv. 16, 17).

II. *Thou, and the Ark of Thy strength.* This is the only place in the Psalms where the Ark is mentioned ; and

the phrase "Ark of Thy strength" occurs in only one other passage (II Chron. vi. 41). We are told that when the Ark of the Covenant set out, it was to seek for a resting place for God's people; and that with the Ark was associated the place of meeting or communion of God with His people (cf. Exod. xxv. 22; xxix. 43; Numb. xvii. 4). The term "Thy strength" signifies that without God's presence His Church (whether Jewish or Christian) could not prosper. As a symbol of God's presence and strength, it was before the Ark that the waters of Jordan parted asunder; the walls of Jericho fell down; and the Philistine idol Dagon was shattered.

The Ark was brought from the temporary dwelling-place provided by David (II Sam. vi. 17), and enthroned in the Holy of Holies in Solomon's temple: and there it remained some 400 years, till the destruction of that temple by Nebuchadnezzar, when the Ark disappeared. In the second temple there was no Ark.

III. Through the Incarnation the human soul became God's dwelling-place. The Dove then found a resting place in man, and man became a temple of God (I Cor. iii. 16, 17; vi. 19). At Pentecost, by the descent of the Holy Ghost, the Church became the mystical body of Christ. In baptism, through the agency of the same Spirit of God, we, as individuals, are incorporated into Christ. We are born anew of water and the Spirit (cf. S. John iii. 3-8), and become the dwelling-place of the Holy Ghost, and the temple of God. S. Paul in the passages referred to, reminds us of this fact, and uses it as an argument for sanctity of body and soul, warning us of the awful consequence of defiling God's temple.

In each Communion we make, by the agency of the Holy Spirit, Christ enters our soul to feed us with His body, to wash us through His most precious blood, and so unites us more and more closely to Himself.

PENITENCE AND FEAR

“ O Lord, rebuke me not in Thine anger, neither chasten me in Thy hot displeasure.”—PSALM vi. 1.

I. THIS Psalm treats of the beginnings of penitence. It strikes distinctly the lowest note in the penitential Psalms, opening, as it does, with Fear as the motive of penitence. But while it opens thus, it closes with the joy of pardon and the assurance of deliverance. Some may ask, Is not love the right motive of contrition ? And *there is no fear in love : but perfect love casteth out fear* (I S. John iv. 18). Yes ; but contrition is not generally the beginning of penitence, and perfect love is quite incompatible with wilful sin. Fear is frequently the beginning of a penitence which ends in love, as the lives of the saints so often show us. As S. Augustine puts it, “ The needle of fear must go before the thread of love.” The needle punctures the place where the thread is to enter : the needle is drawn out, but the thread remains, and holds the work together. So in penitence, fear punctures the hard heart and gives the grace of compunction ; and love follows, and by contrition completes the work, and binds the soul to God for ever.

II. The penitent, having deprecated God’s judgments, brings forward five pleas for mercy.

i. His weakness and misery—*Have mercy upon me, O Lord, for I am withered away* (weak, P.B.V.) . . . *my bones* (the strongest part of my body) *are vexed*.

ii. *And Thou, O Lord, how long ?* How long, that is, wilt Thou punish, How long wilt Thou not have mercy ?

iii. Having pleaded his own weakness and misery, the penitent now from God’s nature draws two arguments for mercy and forgiveness. His third plea is God’s attribute of mercy ; for the sake of which he prays God to turn and deliver him. *Return, O Lord, deliver my soul : Save me for Thy loving kindness sake*, etc. (v. 4). How beautifully the order of grace is preserved in the three clauses of this verse ! God is turned to us, and looks upon us with His grace. We are turned to God, and so delivered and freed

from guilt. Lastly, freed from sin, we are saved from the peril of condemnation, which threatened us. But all this—which is done in the act of Justification—is not the result of any preceding merits of our own, but solely of God's mercy.

iv. The fourth plea rests on the final cause of man's creation, that it is for God's glory—*For in death there is no remembrance of Thee : in Sheol who shall give Thee thanks ?* (v. 5). These words may be taken, as S. Augustine suggests, of the fact that there is no repentance after death. They may also be referred to that death which is separation from God by sin. Or they may be related to eternal death after the Day of Judgment. Thus, taking us back again to the first thought of the Psalm.

v. *I am weary with my groaning ; every night make I my bed to swim ; I water my couch with my tears* (v. 6). Here we have the fifth and last plea, the showing forth the fruits of true penitence, the broken and contrite heart which God will not despise.

III. *Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity* (v. 8) What a change is here ! From darkness to light, from weeping to joy ! And this marks the first great result of penitence—the breaking away from sin, avoiding occasions of sin, giving up the companions and occupations which led us into sin. It has been said, Nine-tenths of perseverance are made up of avoiding occasions of sin.

And then notice the threefold repetition of the act of faith, as a mark of joy. *The Lord hath heard the voice of my weeping. The Lord hath heard my supplication ; The Lord will receive my prayer* (v. 9). Very beautifully S. Hilary represents penitential tears as going on an embassy to the throne of grace, and this as the result.

THE HAPPINESS OF THE FORGIVEN SINNER

"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile."—PSALM xxxii. 1, 2.

I. THIS is the second Psalm in the Psalter which begins with "Blessed." The first of all the Psalms tells of the blessedness of innocence, or rather, of Him Who alone was innocent. This speaks of the blessedness of penitence, as experienced by the King of penitents, David.

No one knows better the sweetness of health than he who laments lost health : so David then first truly realized how sweet it is to be free from sin, when he had tasted the bitterness of sin. For this reason he begins this Psalm of penitence with the praise of the condition of the forgiven sinner.

II. The first two verses, which describe the happiness of being in a state of grace, consist of four clauses, each expressing with closest theological accuracy one aspect of sin. In the Hebrew of these verses there are three distinct words used for "sin;" and three corresponding words for God's remission of sin. A careful examination of these verses therefore enables us to obtain three pictures of sin as viewed from different standpoints. The three words for sin are *transgression* (Heb. *pesha*), *sin* (*chataah*), and *iniquity* (*avon*).

i. The first (*pesha*, LXX. *ἀνομίας*, Vulg. *iniquitates*) regards sin as an offence against God, a transgression, lawlessness, an act of rebellion. This is *forgiven* (*nasa* = lifted away). The burden of sin is lightened, the debt is lifted away and remitted, for it could never be paid. As in the Parable of the unmerciful Servant—and *forgave him the debt* (S. Matt. xviii. 27); and again, *Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!* (S. John i. 29).

ii. Sin *Chataah*, LXX. *ἀμαρτίαν*, Vulg. *peccata*). Here, underlying all the words, is the idea of "missing the mark" (as in Judg. xx. 16). Sin is looked upon as the

failure of the *end* of life, the erring from the way which leads to the goal, a deflection from our aim, a not doing our duty. *Chattath* is the word used for "sin-offering, and for legal defilement. This is said to be *covered* (*hasah*).

iii. *Iniquity* (*avon*), perversity, crookedness. This indicates the internal depravity inherent in the sin, which is not totally eradicated while life lasts. This God *imputeth* not (*chashab*).

To these positive views of sin is added a negative condition—and *in whose spirit there is no guile*. For pardon it is essential that there be sincerity in the penitent—no dishonesty or hypocrisy, no attempt to disguise or extenuate the sin. This reminds us of Nathanael (the contrast to Jacob), the *Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile* (S. John i. 47). How many a penitence is poisoned with guile !

III. As the darkness of night unveils to us the starlit skies, which otherwise we could never have known, so the darkness of sin, where it has been truly repented of and forgiven, reveals to us a special aspect of the love of God, the love of compassion for sinners, which led Him to give *His Only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have eternal life* (S. John iii. 16). There is a joy in penitence that springs not so much from relief of the burden of sin, as from the discovery and experience of a new quality in God's love—the tender pity for the penitent. This is exquisitely set before us in the Parable of the Prodigal Son—*But the father said to his servants, Bring forth quickly the best robe, and put it on him ; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet : and bring the fatted calf, and kill it, and let us eat, and make merry : for this my son was dead, and is alive again ; he was lost, and is found* (S. Luke xv. 22-24). Let us so truly sorrow for our sins that we may know this joy.

SATISFACTION FOR SIN

“ For Thine arrows stick fast in me, and Thy hand presseth me sore.”—PSALM xxxviii. 2.

As the first of the Penitential Psalms tells of sorrow for sin, and the second of confession of sin, so the third treats of satisfaction for sin. This does not mean that anything we can do can make satisfaction to the justice of God. That was made once for all for us by the sacrifice of Christ upon the Cross. Nevertheless there remains the temporal punishment for post-baptismal sin, which God sees fit to inflict on us for our good, and for the satisfaction of His justice.

From internal evidence this Psalm is thought to have been written not long before the revolt of Absalom, when David was prostrated by severe sickness, which afforded an opportunity for the machinations of Absalom and his associates. From this sickness David recovered only in time to witness the temporary success of their conspiracy. Throughout the psalm David's chief thought seems to have been, I have deserved all this suffering, it is the just consequence of my sin. God has not forsaken me, the very fact of my punishment is an assurance of this.

I. *For Thine arrows stick fast in me, and Thine hand presseth me sore.* These arrows of God are many ; all are intensely painful, but very salutary. They may be taken of the immediate temporal results of sin. In David's case how many they were ! The death of his child, the sin of Amnon with Tamar, the murder of Amnon, the violation of his own wives by Absalom, his temporary expulsion from his kingdom, and the death of his favourite son Absalom. Another arrow of God which we often experience is that after our sin has been forgiven, we are not delivered from its temptations. They perhaps return to tempt us again and again, until continual struggle against them has developed in us their opposite virtue. Moreover, the ever threatening danger leads to a habit of watchfulness which is a great element of strength in the spiritual life. There are many other arrows which do their salutary work in

us. The stings of conscience or the words of God in H.S., which stick in our hearts, and bring home to us the sinfulness of our sin.

II. *There is no soundness in my flesh because of Thine indignation ; neither is there any health in my bones because of my sin* (v. 3). Here we have the general effect of God's arrows in depriving us of rest and peace. This is part of God's goodness to us, and is sent that it may stimulate us to such a deep and enduring penitence as may secure for us true and lasting peace. We must be on our guard against the danger of a false peace. There are many have peace with sin, because they consent to it and obey it, even though their conscience upbraids them. There are others still worse, whose conscience has become dumb because they have so long resisted its monitions.

III. *For mine iniquities are gone over mine head : as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me* (v. 4). Here the penitent tells why the thought of his sins so greatly distresses him : it is because they are so many and so great. Because they are so many, like the waves of the sea, they have gone over his head submerging him. Hence, in the words of another Psalm, he prays, *Out of the deep have I cried unto Thee, O Lord* (Ps. cxxx. 1). Of their enormity he says, they are like a heavy burden too great for me to bear. We may think of David in his penitence examining himself, and tracing the various ramifications of his sin. The sin had been adultery and murder, but how far-reaching had been its malice, how many it had injured ! A faithful servant, Uriah, whom he had deprived of life and wife ; Bathsheba, whom he had led into mortal sin. A real facing of the consequences of our sins to others as well as to ourselves is a great element in true penitence.

THE PRAYER OF THE TRUE PENITENT

"Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin."—PSALM li. 2.

THIS is the Psalm of Psalms ! Of all inspired words, with the one exception of the Lord's prayer, that which has been most often repeated by the Church. So profound a conviction of sin, so deep and unfeigned a penitence, so true a confession ; a heart so tender, so contrite, a desire so fervent for renewal ; a trust so humble, so filial, in the forgiving love of God, we find nowhere else in the O.T., perhaps nowhere else in the world ; but it is surely what we might expect *from the man after God's own heart* (I Sam. iii. 14). Indeed, it is what explains and justifies that title.

I. In this verse is summed up the prayer of the true penitent. In the first verse, appealing to the loving-kindness and tender mercy of God, he beseeches that his transgression may be blotted out ; now he goes on to explain exactly what he means. It is something far more than the mere forgiveness of the sin that he asks, it is the cleansing him from all the defilement that the sin has left. *Wash me thoroughly.* The Hebrew word for "thoroughly" which signifies "multiplying" has been rendered in the LXX. by "*ἐπιπλείων*," an intensive of the comparative "*πλείον*" = more ; in the version of Symmachus by "*πολλακίς*" = many times, more than once ; in the Vulgate by "*amplius*" = more. The prayer of David is clearly for an ever fuller cleansing from his sin, not only blotting out of its guilt, but the gradual removal more and more of its effects in his soul. For after the remission of guilt and the restoration of grace, there yet remains in man not only the evil tendencies of his nature, but the temptations which arise from the very sins that have been forgiven, the memory of which often remains as a sore trial, and, as in the case of one recovering from severe pulmonary

While Psalm LI is not actually one of the proper Psalms for Ash Wednesday, its appointment for use in the Communion Office justifies its insertion here.

disease, like pneumonia, it leaves him still with a predisposition to a relapse. So after hearing the assurance of his forgiveness from the lips of Nathan, David goes on to pray that he may not only be forgiven, but washed again and again until all traces of his sin, even the weakness it has left, are removed.

II. We may notice that it is not the punishment that is deprecated, but the traces of his sin that he prays to have washed away. How terrible that punishment was the story of David's life tells us ! There was the death of his child, the shame of Tamar, the murder of Amnon, the dishonouring of his own wives by his favourite son, and finally, the rebellion and death of Absalom. Much of this was foretold him by Nathan (II Sam. xii. 9-14), but David does not once ask for any mitigation of the penalty, only for the removal of the stain upon his soul.

III. *Wash me thoroughly.* How we need in these cold days to make this our prayer. In these lukewarm times, when men will barely repent of sin at all, when for the Sacrament of Penance they substitute the world's Sacrament of forgetfulness, let us pray, Wash me more and more, let me not be satisfied with one act of penitence, with one confession of sin, but help me to live the life of penitence, to make those other words of this Psalm really mine, *My sin is ever before me* (v. 3): teach me to stamp out, to eradicate all the ramifications of my sin, so that I may once again be pleasing in Thy sight. Yes ; the motive of penitence should not be merely that we may win Heaven, but that we may be restored to the love of God, our Father. People are sorry for their sins for three reasons—on account of the loss they occasion, the loss of Heaven ; on account of the punishment they involve in the departure of the soul to hell ; and because by our sin we are alienated from God, and we desire above all things to be restored to His love. This last is the only worthy motive of penitence. This was what made David pray, *Wash me thoroughly from . . . my sin.*

OUT OF THE DEPTHS

“ Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice : Let Thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications.”—Psalm cxxx. 1, 2.

THIS most exquisite Psalm is the sixth of the Penitentials, and the eleventh of the Gradual Psalms. It is probably of late date, perhaps written after the return from the Captivity; and, as one of the Graduals, intended to be sung by the pilgrims “going up” to keep the yearly feasts at Jerusalem. Its key-note is Hope, trustful longing for redemption. Its passionate earnestness is marked by the recurrence in it, no less than eight times, of the Divine Name.

I. *Out of the depths.* Most commentators dwell on the point that “depths” is plural; and they have exhausted their ingenuity in enumerating from how many depths the soul must cry to God—from the depths of misery and sin, of sorrow and affliction, of darkness and doubt, of passion and weakness, etc. But we will dwell now only on the one to which S. Chrysostom makes special reference, *the depths of the heart*. He lays stress on the difference between those prayers which are but utterances of the lips, while the mind is wandering to other things, and those prayers which with great earnestness and fervour come from the depths of the heart, from the inmost recesses of the mind and soul. He uses the image of a tree to illustrate this. A strong tree drives its roots down deep into the earth, and is therefore able to stand unmoved against every blast of the storm; while one whose roots are all on the surface, if any storm arises, is torn up by the roots, and falls headlong to the ground. So, he says, prayers, which come from the bottom of the heart, and have their roots in the very depths of the soul, stand fast, and are not hindered, although innumerable distracting thoughts may come. But those prayers which come only from the lips are rendered nugatory by even slight wandering thoughts.

II. *But there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared* (v. 4). The purpose for which God freely

forgives sin is not that man may think lightly of sin, and regard God as easy-going and tolerant of it, but that men may magnify His grace and mercy in its forgiveness, and fear Him. Among the earliest fruits of penitence and forgiveness is the restoration of that first gift of the Holy Ghost, the gift of Holy Fear. The experience of every true penitent after absolution is a sense of joyful awe, of intense reverence, which is a great safeguard against relapsing into sin. This, however, is not what the worldling feels. With him God's mercy leads to familiarity and irreverence. But then the world's methods of penitence, since they are but superficial, probably seldom lead to forgiveness.

III. *I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in His word do I hope* (v. 5). This is the attitude of the forgiven soul towards God, an attitude of waiting. The new life to which penitence introduces us may be a long life; and we ought to realize that a great part of it must be spent in patient waiting, the eye of the soul fixed on God, in expectant waiting, the ear of the soul listening for His voice. We must not look forward to a continuance of the exceptional experiences which followed our forgiveness, but must prepare ourselves for the ordinary routine of the spiritual life, and this is well expressed in another Psalm (cxxiii. 1, 2), *Unto Thee do I lift up mine eyes, O Thou that sittest in the heavens. Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress; so our eyes look unto the Lord our God.* As our falls in the past came from looking away from God, so in watching and waiting for Him will be our hope and strength during the remainder of our life.

THE CRY OF DERELICTION

“*My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me ?*”—
Psalm xxii. 1.

THE most wonderful of all the Psalms, the clearest prophecy ever uttered, the first unmistakable revelation of the Gospel of Redemption. The Psalm is ascribed to David, and yet it is quite impossible to connect it with any experience of David's life. Its correspondence with the incidents of our Lord's Passion, which is admitted on all hands, obliges us to regard it as purely prophetic. This has been the traditional view of the Christian Church, that David, full of the Holy Ghost, was moved to speak in the Person of Christ, and to describe, not his own sufferings and perils and deliverance, but those of his great anti-type the Messiah, which were revealed to him by the Holy Ghost.

I. *My God, My God, why didst Thou forsake Me ?** In these opening words of the Psalm we are at once brought face to face with the deepest mystery of the Passion of Christ—His dereliction. The humiliations and sufferings endured in His various trials, the fearful pain of the cruel scourging and of the actual crucifixion, all led up to the three hours of darkness, towards the close of which Jesus spoke these words. They are at once a mystery and a revelation. A mystery in that it is difficult to understand how He, Who was “of one substance with the Father” in the indivisible essence of the Godhead, could be forsaken by Him. A revelation in that it was a making known to us the intense suffering of the sacred soul of Jesus, the bitterness of the cup He drank that He might make atonement for our sins.

II. We need clearly to keep before us two things.

i. That never for one moment was there any separation between Christ's Godhead and His Humanity. But that,

* ἐγκατέλιπες 2nd aor., not a perfect ; Why didst Thou forsake me ? Not, Why hast Thou ? This is important as meeting the assertion that during the three hours' darkness our Lord's faith failed. All the Synoptists state that the darkness was from the sixth hour *until* the ninth ; and then, after the darkness had past or was passing away, these words were uttered—i.e., looking back upon it, our Lord asks : Why didst Thou forsake Me ? The first words, *My God, My God*, are quite inconsistent with a failure of faith.

as S. Jerome says, the human soul of Christ was at that time deprived of the influx of consolation both from the Father and the Word. The two supreme moments in our Lord's Passion were the Agony in the garden of Gethsemane, when the sacrifice of will was consummated—*Father, if Thou be willing, remove this cup from Me : nevertheless not My will, but Thine, be done* (S. Luke xxii. 42); and the darkness on the Cross, when He said, *My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me ?*

ii. That the utterance was not "O God," but "My God." There was here no wavering of faith or purpose. And the two words that followed, probably close together, *It is finished*, and *Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit*, bear witness to the same entire resignation to His Father's will.

III. Of the many lessons taught us by our Lord's words, let us confine ourselves to one. They are a revelation of the awful consequences of sin in separating us from God. The soul of the baptized Christian is God's sanctuary, His temple: but this is only when in a state of grace. A mortal sin robs the soul of this grace, and cuts it off from the life of God. Too often this effect is not felt by the sinner. His great desire, probably, is to get away from God, to shut God out of his thoughts, out of his life. He does not realize how awful it is to be alienated from God. The soul of Jesus, on the other hand, though never having been clouded by one thought of sin, and never for one moment separated from God, experiences the deepest horror and distress at the temporary withdrawal of the joy and consolation of the Presence of God at that period, when the sins of all the world were borne by Him and atonement made for them. Let us dread more than any other punishment the loss of our union with God occasioned by an act of mortal sin.

THE ATONEMENT AND THE INCARNATION

"Thou art He that took Me out of the womb : Thou didst make Me trust when I was upon My mother's breasts. I was cast upon Thee from the womb : Thou art My God from My mother's belly."—Psalm xxii. 9, 10.

IN these words is traced the close relation which exists between the Incarnation and the Atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are reminded that the very same Body, *so marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men* (Isa. lii. 14), was that Body which had been glorified with such singular honour, when the Holy Ghost came upon Mary, and the power of the Most High overshadowed her (cf. S. Luke i. 35): that this Body now so torn and so mangled, as it had been the wonder, so should it be the joy, of the holy angels; and that having by the resurrection put on immortality, it should be, so long as the world should last, the strength and the support of all His faithful people.

I. From the 12th century, the purpose of the Incarnation was the great question discussed by the schoolmen. It may be said to have had its beginning in S. Anselm's "*Cur Deus Homo.*" In the next century it was developed by S. Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus. The former taught that the Incarnation was necessitated by man's sin; for which, through the sacrifice of the Cross, it was the remedy. The latter maintained that the Incarnation was the original purpose of God in creating, and that it was the divine means by which man, and in him all creation, was to be taken into God. The sacrifice of the Cross, moreover, was necessitated by man's sin—a cause not originally present. This is probably the opinion held by most theologians in the present day; chiefly because it gives such a consistent explanation of all God's works in creation and redemption.

II. The Incarnation and the Atonement are often spoken of as the two fundamental doctrines of Christianity. We must, however, remember that we can scarcely divide them into separate dogmas; since, given the existence of

sin, the Atonement is the necessary working out of the Incarnation in its relation to sin. The Passion is the revelation of the greatness of God's love and truth; for on the Cross *Mercy and truth are met together ; righteousness and peace have kissed each other* (Ps. lxxxv. 10). *There* is displayed the intense malice of sin, in that it crucified the Son of God; *there* is revealed the immense love of God, in *that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have eternal life* (S. John iii. 16). *There* is manifested the justice of God, in that the wages of sin—death—are paid in full by Him Who as perfect Man, the second Adam in Whom the race had its new-birth, became obedient unto death (Phil. ii. 8).

III. As I gaze upon the crucifix, and meditate upon the tragedy it recalls, there are surely three lessons it teaches me.

i. To hate not only sin in the abstract, but those concrete acts of sin of mine, those sins which sit so lightly on me, to make atonement for which Jesus died.

ii. To adore the wondrous love of Jesus, Who to save me from the consequences of my sins bore their burden, and paid their penalty, that I might live with Him eternally.

iii. To learn to welcome the pains and sorrows of my life, which the justice of God sends me that I may so know the fellowship of the sufferings of Jesus, and the power of His resurrection, as to be made a partaker in that glory which shall be revealed when He comes with His angels to judge the world (cf. Phil. iii. 10; I S. Pet. v. 1; S. Matt. xxv. 31-34).

THE SONG OF REDEMPTION

"I waited patiently for the Lord; And He inclined unto Me, and heard My cry. He brought Me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay; And He set My feet upon a rock, and established My goings. And He hath put a new song in My mouth, even praise unto our God."—Psalm xl. 1-3.

THE statement in Heb. x. 5-9, *Wherefore when He cometh into the world, He saith, etc.*, leaves no room for doubt that in this Psalm David, inspired by the Holy Ghost, spoke in the Person of Christ. While therefore we can find much in it which we may apply to our own experiences, we must to-day confine its teaching to its revelation of the Passion of Christ.

I. *I waited patiently for the Lord.* Is not this the utterance of humanity, as summed up in the Manhood of Christ, looking back to the first promise, the first prophecy, that the seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head? That expectation had been quickened and renewed in every age by types and prophecies; and now the time of waiting is approaching its end. *He inclined unto Me, and heard My cry.* Was not this fulfilled when our Lord—after the triumph cry, *It is finished*, and the last prayer of commendation, *Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit—bowed His head, and gave up His spirit* (S. John xix. 30). *He brought Me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay; and He set My feet upon a rock.* Mediæval writers refer this to the prophecy of Zechariah (ix. 11, 12), *As for Thee also, because of the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth Thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water. Turn you to the stronghold, ye prisoners of hope.* These prisoners of hope are the faithful of the old Covenant, who in Limbus awaited the coming of Christ.

II. May we not also see in this second verse a description of the misery and danger of a sinner imprisoned in the mire of sin, the load of guilt upon his conscience pressing him down ever deeper and deeper in the miry clay? Above him is the Rock of Ages which, unaided, he can never reach. Jesus by His Passion lifts all penitent sinners to

that Rock, *and establishes their goings*. Jesus leaves them no longer floundering in the mire of iniquity, but teaches them to walk in His truth, the Dayspring from on high guiding their feet into the way of peace (cf. Ps. lxxxvi. 11; S. Luke i. 78, 79).

III. *And He hath put a new song in My mouth*. A new song, because the old songs are insufficient to celebrate so great a deliverance as that secured to us by the passion and death of Christ. Some ancient commentators have taken it of the angels' song, *Gloria in Excelsis*, first heard at the Nativity; others of Simeon's *Nunc Dimittis*, proclaiming the extension of Redemption to the Gentiles; yet others, of the song of Moses and the Lamb (cf. Rev. xv. 3), which is sung by the denizens of Heaven, who, victorious in all life's battles, have been set upon the Rock of Ages, where no storms of temptation can ever again reach them.

In this life we must learn that song which none can learn but those who have been purchased by the precious blood of Jesus (cf. Rev. xiv. 3). How often here we should rehearse it, as we thank God for deliverance after deliverance from temptation and sin, so that we may be prepared to take our part in the praise of God in eternity. How long humanity waited for the Saviour Who was to deliver it from the horrible pit and miry clay in which it struggled. May not many of us as individuals apply this to ourselves? How long perhaps did I wander in the paths of sin before I learned to know Jesus as my Saviour, my God, and my All! Surely I should never tire of rehearsing my song of thanksgiving for redemption, but rather should I find ever new joys in singing "Rock of Ages cleft for me, let me hide myself in Thee."

THE ESSENCE OF ALL TRUE SACRIFICE

"Sacrifice and offering Thou hast no delight in; Mine ears hast Thou opened: Burnt offering and sin offering hast Thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I am come; in the roll of the book it is written of Me: I delight to do Thy will, O My God; Yea, Thy law is within My heart."—PSALM xl. 6-8.

IN the Epistle to the Hebrews (c. x. 5), these verses are connected with Christ's sacrifice on the Cross, and the Church, by appointing this Psalm as one of the Proper Psalms for Good Friday (in Sarum, Latin, and present English uses), endorses this association. The importance of the passage lies chiefly in the emphasis it puts upon the offering of the will and heart as the essential element in all acceptable sacrifices (cf. li. 16; lxix. 30, 31; I Sam. xv. 22; Isa. i. 11; Jer. vii. 21; Hos. vi. 6; Mic. vi. 6-8).

I. The paraphrase of Bishop Perowne brings out very beautifully the force of these words. "My heart is full to overflowing with the thought of Thy goodness. How can I express it? Once I should have thought sacrifice and offerings a proper and sufficient acknowledgment. Now I feel how inadequate these are; for Thou hast taught me the truth: my deaf, unwilling ear didst Thou open, that it might understand that a willing heart was the best offering I could render. Then, being taught of Thee, I said, Lo, I come, presenting myself before Thee, not with a dead and formal service, but with myself as a living sacrifice."

II. The death of Christ was the propitiation for the sins of the whole world (cf. Rom. iii. 22-25; I S. John ii. 1,2). But we may ask, What gave to the *death* of Christ its propitiatory value? We find the answer in this passage. S. Bernard, distinguishing between the fact of the death of our Lord and that inner act of His will which gave it its propitiatory value, expresses the distinction thus: "Not His death, but the willing acceptance of death was pleasing to God." This will be more readily appreciated when it is remembered that the essence of man's sin was from the first disobedience, the rebellion of man's will against God.

It was our Lord's perfect obedience throughout His life, which was consummated on the Cross, that made His death "a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world."

III. It is this element of devotion to the will of God that gives to all our offerings, whether great or small, their true worth and efficacy. It is not the greatness of the sufferings we endure, but the spirit in which we bear them that enables us to offer them in union with the sufferings of Our Lord Jesus Christ. S. Paul again and again refers to this (Phil. iii. 10; Col. i. 24; etc.). The keynote to the purpose of our Lord's life is struck in His first recorded words—*Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?* (S. Luke ii. 49)—We find this repeated in slightly different forms in His sayings—*My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to accomplish His work. I seek not Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me. Father, if Thou be willing, remove this cup from Me : nevertheless not My will, but Thine, be done* (S. John iv. 34; v. 30; S. Luke xxii. 42).

To do God's will ought to be the purpose of every life. This is only to say that God has a special work for each of us to do. It is revealed to us through our vocation, which generally is made known to us in the ordinary workings of God's Providence. This is intimated in several of our Lord's parables; and in two—those of The Talents and of The Pounds—we are shown that, upon the accomplishment of our work, our future in eternity depends. How earnestly then should we pray to know God's will for us, and how diligently should we strive to fulfil it. Every time we say the Lord's Prayer, the petition, "Thy Will be done," reminds us of this.

CHRIST'S CRAVING FOR SYMPATHY

"Reproach hath broken My heart; and I am full of heaviness: And I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none."—PSALM lxix. 20.

THE Psalm of the Man of Sorrows—telling us of His afflictions, of His hopes, of His prayers. Sorrow is the lot of man in this world. But in His love God has given him one great gift to enable him to bear it—the divine gift of sympathy. How great are its powers! To know that another suffers with us, enters into our sorrows, desires to share with us our burden, how it lightens the load. S. Paul exhorts Christians to bear one another's burdens, and so to fulfil the law of Christ (cf. Gal. vi. 2). Some of us know by experience the relief gained from the sympathy of a friend. Others have tasted the joy of being privileged to wipe away the tears of sorrow: surely, a foretaste of heavenly joy—to be permitted to do in some small measure what God will do completely in that day when He wipes away all tears (cf. Rev. xxi. 4).

I. Jesus the Man of Sorrows was also the Man of Sympathy. Never had anyone such deep sympathy as He. We are told of His "groaning" at the misery of the deaf man with an impediment in his speech at Decapolis, we read of His weeping at the grave of Lazarus, and over the doomed city of Jerusalem, and in the garden of Gethsemane: three mysteries of tears which were all revelations of His sympathy for us. But He, Who in His perfect manhood sympathized with us in our sorrows, in that manhood also yearned for sympathy, when the sorrows of the Passion were upon Him—*I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none.* Jesus looked for some to sorrow with Him (the Vulgate has *contristaretur*), but He found no man.

II. There is an opinion, upheld by many saints, that the immediate cause of Our Lord's death was not the crucifixion, but a heart broken by man's ingratitude. They point to the fact that *Pilate marvelled if He were already dead*; since crucifixion generally involved a slow

death, and neither of the robbers died of it alone (S. Mark xv. 44). *Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto My sorrow, which is done unto Me* (Lam. i. 12). And except for four women and one man at the Cross, it seemed to be nothing. The priests as they passed by mocked Him, the callous soldiers cast lots for His garments, while He was dying before their eyes. Well might His heart be broken!

III. Are we better now? How often we read this Psalm, and are touched by its beauty and immense pathos! But what do we do to show our pity for Him? Do we truly repent of our sins?—for love of Him, not merely for fear of their consequences in this world or of their punishment in the next. He said, on the Cross, *I thirst*. Do you bring Him your tears of penitence? Do you offer to Him a broken and contrite heart, a heart broken at the thought of His sufferings, a heart beating in sympathy with them?

We dwell often only on the physical sufferings of the Passion, but great as they were, terrible to contemplate, were not the sufferings of the mind of Christ far greater? His bodily pains drew from Him no complaint; it was His mental sufferings which wrung from Him the bitter cry, *My God, My God, why didst Thou forsake Me?* And it was all for you and me. What can we do now, to-day, to show our sympathy with the sorrows of Jesus, to bind up His broken heart? Ask the Holy Spirit, the dear Spirit of penitence, to help you, to teach you to repent, to give you a deeper, truer contrition, to pierce your heart with compunction for your sins. These are His special gifts. Christ said of Him, He (the Comforter), when He is come, will convict the world in respect of sin (S. John xvi. 8). Pray Him to give you a deep conviction of your sins. Thus will you be able to sympathize with him.

CHRIST'S ACT OF FAITH BEFORE HIS PASSION

"I have set God always before Me : for He is on My right hand, therefore I shall not fall, etc."—PSALM xvi. 9-12.

IT is a matter of surprise that this is not one of the Proper Psalms for Easter Day (though in the Gregorian Breviary it is appointed for Easter Eve) ; since it is the only Psalm concerning which we have Apostolic authority for interpreting it exclusively of our Lord's resurrection. For more than a thousand years these verses were sung, were used as a prayer and for meditation, by devout souls, who found in them consolation and strength, but with imperfect understanding of the hidden treasure they enshrined. At last, on the Day of Pentecost, when S. Peter, inspired by the Holy Ghost, preached the first sermon of the newborn Church, the key was inserted and its meaning unlocked, when he said, *David . . . being therefore a prophet, . . . he foreseeing this spake of the resurrection of the Christ, that neither was He left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption* (Acts ii. 30, 31). And S. Paul applies this passage similarly (cf. Acts xiii. 36, 37). The whole Psalm has been taken by many commentators of Christ, and as setting forth His prayer for preservation amid the sufferings of His Passion.

I. *I have set God always before Me : for He is on My right hand, therefore I shall not fall.* Of our Lord these words may be said as of none other ; for from the first moment of His conception, being hypostatically one with the Father, the Lord was indeed always with Him (cf. S. John xiv. 11 ; xvii. 21). *Wherefore My heart was glad, and My glory rejoiced : My flesh also shall rest in hope* (v. 10). *My heart, My glory* ; that is, *My soul* : the whole man is signified by this expression. All rejoices, all rests in hope. The words tell of Christ's joy in approaching the moment of redemption for mankind, when He could say, *It is finished.*

II. *For why ? Thou shalt not leave My soul in hell : neither shalt Thou suffer Thy Holy One to see corruption* (v. 11). This passage is of immense importance, because

(as interpreted Acts ii. 31 ; xiii. 37) it assures us that our Lord's most holy body in the grave underwent no corruption (*διαφθοράν*, the word used by SS. Peter and Paul, signifies primarily "destruction," but in a human body corruption is the process of destruction). The difference between our Lord's body in death and our own consists in this fact that, while the soul was separated from the body, the latter was preserved from all touch of decomposition. The soul too was not left in Hades, but after it had preached to the spirits in prison, and sent forth the prisoners of hope (I S. Pet. iii. 19 ; Zech. ix. 11), it rejoined the body, and was raised up from death, *because it was not possible that He should be holden of it* (Acts ii. 24).

III. *Thou shalt shew me the path of life ; in Thy presence is the fulness of joy : and at Thy right hand there is pleasure for evermore* (v. 12). We may address these words to the great Captain of our Salvation on this festival of His glorious victory over death. Having by baptism died unto sin, *that like as Christ was raised from the dead . . . so we also might walk in newness of life* (Rom. vi. 4) ; we now make our act of faith that He, the Lord of Life, will shew us the path of life. It is the path that He trod from Bethlehem to Calvary, a path of trial and suffering ; but for those who have risen with Him, it stops not at the grave, but leads on from the green sward of the Mount of Olives to the throne of God, where at His right hand is the fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore. So S. Paul exhorts us—*If then ye were raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God* (Col. iii. 1).

THE CRUCIFIED HEART

“ My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed : I will sing, and give praise.”—PSALM lvii. 8.

UGHT not this to be our Easter resolution ? made in the spirit of Good Friday, made in the strength of our Easter Communion ? Then, we saw Christ, for our Salvation, fixed to the Cross—crucified for me. Shall I not therefore say with S. Paul, as I meditate upon that scene of Divine love and sorrow—*I have been crucified with Christ* (Gal. ii. 20). My heart has been pierced by His love. Henceforth, it shall be a crucified heart, fixed, transfixed by the knowledge of His love for me.

I. Contemplate the nailing of Christ’s sacred members to the Cross. He heard the mocking cry—*He saved others ; Himself He cannot save* (S. Mark xv. 31). It was true, in the sense that, if He had saved Himself, He could not have been the Saviour of the World. The cruel nails which pierced His hands and feet could not have held Him to the Cross, if it had not been His will to die there for sinful men. It was His love for sinners, for me, that kept Him fixed to the Cross through those long hours, till He died. Shall not then the thought of all His love awaken in my heart a love strong enough to keep me crucified with Christ, till, like Him, I die upon my cross, and others take me down to lay me in the grave ?

II. *I will sing, and give praise.* From the contemplation of our Lord’s supreme act of love in dying for us, we turn with joy to the glorious festival of His victory over death, that victory by which He redeemed us from the power of death. The overwhelming thought and feeling must be one of praise and thanksgiving for the victory won, for the work finished, for the salvation secured. How constant should be our praises to God Who at so great a cost delivered us from the bondage of sin, and from the dominion of the devil ! How fervent our thanksgivings for the love manifested in the Atonement, the love with which *God so loved the world, that He gave His Only Begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but*

have eternal life (S. John iii. 16) ! And this praise must not be confined to Easter, when we commemorate our Lord's triumph ; but must be renewed every weekly memorial of His resurrection ; and more, every day, as from the depth of our hearts we say, " We bless Thee for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life ; but above all for the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ."

Awake up my glory, awake, lute and harp. For " my glory " Sept. and Vulg. have " my tongue." But " glory " here is probably a synonym for " soul," as being the noblest part of man. " Will awake right early " should be translated " Will awake the dawn." This, like Ps. iii. 5, has been regarded as the utterance of Christ, foretelling His resurrection ; for Jesus rose early on the first day of the week (cf. S. Mark xvi. 9).

III. *Set up Thyself, O God, above the heavens : and Thy glory above all the earth* (vv. 6, 12). This is the refrain or Chorus of the Psalm, and forms its conclusion. It is addressed to our Lord ; and seems to contrast Christ's exaltation in glory in heaven with His exaltation in suffering and humiliation upon the Cross. It calls on Him, Who to redeem man was set up on high upon the Cross, as a spectacle to men and angels, henceforth to take His place at the right hand of the Father above the heavens, there to intercede for us. Heaven and earth, as these words imply, have a mutually interwoven history, whose glorious end is in the sunrise of Divine blessing over both.

THE SOUL'S EXODUS

“When Israel went forth out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language; Judah became His sanctuary, Israel His dominion.”—PSALM CXIV. 1, 2.

THIS sublime song of the Exodus has been counted by some the grandest of the Psalter. Primarily, it is a description of God's work in leading His people from Egypt to Canaan. But its mystical interpretation as setting forth both Christ's redemption of mankind and the Exodus of the redeemed soul from the bondage of the world, has occupied the attention of most Christian writers. At the Transfiguration our Lord spoke of His exodus (ἐξόδον) which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem (S. Luke ix. 31). Hence the appropriateness of this Psalm for Easter. Let us, however, confine ourselves to its consideration as the story of the Exodus of the soul as delivered by Christ from the bondage of worldliness and sin.

I. The soul in Egypt. Egypt is the great type of the world which, at first, seems so attractive and desirable. Jacob and his sons in the land of Goshen must have found their lot contrasted very favourably with the difficulties and hardships of their sojourn in Canaan. How free from care and protected from danger their life seemed to be. But, after many generations, the Egyptians revealed themselves in their true colours as barbarous and tyrannical taskmasters, who exacted from them a bitter and degrading service which gradually became a shameful slavery. Surely, this is the experience of the soul which has fallen under the bondage of the world, the flesh, and the devil; and it is from this that Christ delivers those who come to Him.

II. The earlier stages of the soul's progress towards freedom.

i. Judah became His sanctuary. This points to the fact that the land of Judah, chosen to be the cradle of the Incarnation, became God's sanctuary, the place God chose to put His Name there (Neh. i. 9; Jer. vii. 12). So the redeemed soul becomes a shrine or sanctuary in which

God dwells, and where He receives, day by day, our acts of love, trust and worship.

ii. The life of God's people was to be a life of obedience to a law given by God, a law which not only taught them how to draw near to God in worship, but regulated the details of their moral life, and provided them with guidance in all the difficulties of that wilderness through which the soul has to pass on its Heavenward way.

iii. A transformation takes place. Things impossible to nature happen through grace. The sea (v. 3), the symbol of the power of spiritual death (Isa. lvii. 20), saw it, and fled. *And you did He quicken, when ye were dead, through your trespasses and sins* (Eph. ii. 1). It is a picture of what takes place in the soul at the time of its real conversion. Old things pass away, they become new (cf. II Cor. v. 17). The streams and courses of life are turned in an opposite direction, as was that of Jordan (v. 5 ; cf. also Josh. iii. 16). The fixed habits and propensities of character—fixed like the mountains and hills of Sinai (v. 6)—are shaken and uprooted. The hardened heart, so rocky, and barren, and dead (v. 8), is transformed into a fountain of waters. The soul is blessed, and becomes a blessing fruitful in others.

III. The relation of Christ's death (exodus) and resurrection to our baptism. Baptism is a veritable death and resurrection of the soul through our incorporation therein with Christ. *Are ye ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him through baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him by the likeness of His death, we shall be also by the likeness of His resurrection* (Rom. vi. 3-5).

THE DAY WHICH THE LORD HATH MADE

"This is the day which the Lord hath made : we will rejoice and be glad in it."—PSALM cxviii. 24.

THIS Psalm seems to have been written for the first Feast of Tabernacles which followed the dedication of the second temple (B.C. 516) as recorded in Ezra iii. 4. It was sung in the procession to the temple, and is antiphonal. *Open to me the gates of righteousness : that I may go into them* (v. 19) is evidently sung by the procession approaching the temple. *This is the gate of the Lord : the righteous shall enter into it* (v. 20) appears to be a solo chanted by a voice from within the temple. *I will thank Thee*, etc. (vv. 21-25) is the chant of the procession as it enters. *Blessed be He that cometh*, etc. (vv. 26-29) is again the response of the temple choir.

I. *This is the day which the Lord hath made.* That means, This day of thanksgiving was foreordained of God, and brought into existence for a special purpose, therefore carrying out God's purpose we will rejoice and be glad in it. How much more was Easter Day foreseen and foreordained by the loving will of God, Who through the storm and suffering of the Passion brought to pass on that day the victory of humanity, when in Christ death was swallowed up in victory. In weekly commemoration of this great event, it was in a unique sense constituted the Day of the Lord, and consecrated to His worship, and to the offering of the sacrifice of thanksgiving, the Holy Eucharist.

II. Easter is the consummation of all other great days.

i. It is the completion of the day of creation : for it is the porch of immortality. The Passover was immediately followed by the Feast of the First-Fruits, when the first-ripe sheaf of wheat was waved before the Lord by the priest (Lev. xxiii. 4-15). The Passover, which commemorated redemption through the death of the first-born, found its fulfilment in the death of our Lord on Good Friday ; Easter is the Feast of the First-Fruits : for then was Christ raised from the dead, *the first-fruits of them that are asleep* (I Cor. xv. 20).

ii. It is the Day of Life. And—what is more—of life

from the dead. This is its special joy, that it is the first-fruits of the harvest of a life that has no ending.

iii. It is the Day of Victory. Not only of our Lord's victory over sin and death, but the pledge and means of ours ; for Christ comes to us in our communions to help us to overcome all our foes.

iv. It is the Day of Peace, the result of victory, of our Lenten struggle. So Christ, on Easter Day, came to His disciples with the salutation—*Peace be unto you*. As was written, *He shall speak peace unto His people, and to His saints, that they turn not again* (Ps. lxxxv. 8).

III. It is the Day of Vision. S. John wrote, *I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day* (Rev. i. 10). And the Book of Revelation contains the vision which he then saw. How greatly we need the power of vision, especially in spiritual things ! The Lord's day ought to be for us, week by week, an opportunity of vision. That it may be so depends on our being in the Spirit on that day, and fulfilling with devotion our privilege and obligation of offering the Holy Sacrifice. Then with Christ sacramentally present in our souls, and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, what visions of Heaven should be ours ! How often Sundays are days of dulness and even of gloom because we expect so little from them ! Otherwise, we might hear Christ's voice, speaking and bringing home to us ever new revelations of His kingdom. They would then be, indeed, days of light and happiness, preparing us for the perfect vision of eternity.

BENEDICTUS QUI VENIT

"Blessed be He that cometh in the Name of the Lord."—
PSALM cxviii. 26.

As has been pointed out in the preceding meditation, this Psalm was written probably for the first Feast of Tabernacles celebrated in the second temple, when it was used as a processional.

These words have a special fitness for our consideration at Easter, when we are celebrating the true Passover, of which all those that went before were but types. At that Passover there was the slaying of the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world ; and there was the actual singing of these words by the multitudes at Jerusalem, as Christ's welcome to their city (cf. S. Matt. xxi. 9).

In practically all the Eastern liturgies (e.g. those of SS. James, Basil, Chrysostom, etc.) the Sanctus concluded with the words, "Hosanna ; Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord." From them they passed into the canon of the Western liturgies, and they were used in the English Prayer Book until A.D. 1552, when they were removed.

I. To us these words ought to be especially precious, as being our anticipatory greeting of our Lord in each Eucharist. They carry us back to the many communions we have made. We received our Lord each time, as the multitude at Jerusalem received Him, with the salutation—*Hosanna : Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord.* But five days later, some of those same voices raised the terrible cry—Crucify Him ; crucify Him. Has it ever been so with us, that after our communion, by yielding to our besetting sin, we crucified our Lord afresh, and put Him to an open shame (cf. Heb. vi. 6) ? How careful we need to be not only to prepare our hearts, by self-examination and acts of sincere contrition, to receive our Lord and King ; but also after we have enthroned Him in our hearts to watch, lest we should yield to temptation, and so drive Him forth from the kingdom to which we had invited Him.

II. The Benedictus is not only a salutation but a prayer—"Hosanna" (Lord, save us). And this adds to its fitness for use at the Eucharist just before the consecration ; for then Jesus, the Blessed One, comes to save us ; since in the offering of the Eucharist we proclaim the Lord's death till he come (I Cor. xi. 26). And by our communion grace is given to enable us to work out our salvation. Again, He came to save the individuals who on Palm Sunday sang, Hosanna, etc. ; but they would not be saved. We need therefore to watch against two dangers—lest we should receive Him indeed, but should not retain the grace of our communion ; or that we should pray Him to save us ; but refuse or neglect the means by which we are to be saved.

III. The Palm procession with the song of Hosanna, etc., is a type of that great procession of the redeemed, who, after the General Judgment, with Jesus shall enter the heavenly Jerusalem ; it is a foreshadowing of that great multitude, standing before the throne and before the Lamb arrayed in white robes, and palms in their hands, who cry, *Salvation unto our God . . . and unto the Lamb*. The angels' song—*Amen : Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen*—takes the place of "Hosanna." It is no longer "Lord, save us" ; for all who have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb are saved and beyond the reach of further possibilities of falling. Therefore they ascribe *Salvation unto our God* (cf. Rev. vii. 9-12).

May we so worship our Lord Jesus Christ and feed upon His body and blood in our Eucharists here that we may have our part in that glorious worship hereafter, where with angels and archangels, and all the company of heaven, we join in the celestial song of praise.

THE CORONATION OF HUMANITY

"What is man, that Thou art mindful of him : and the son of man, that Thou visitest him ? Thou madest him lower than the angels (but little lower than God) : to crown him with glory and worship (honour)."—PSALM viii. 4, 5.

THIS beautiful Psalm, so wonderfully appropriate for the Ascension, was probably a meditation of David, the shepherd of Bethlehem, when watching over his sheep by night beneath the glorious canopy of the starry heavens ; for we observe that he speaks of the moon and the stars, but not of the sun.

I. His first thought is of man's insignificance in the presence of God's super-eminence. His next thought is of man's greatness ; since by His infinite condescension in creating man, God has bestowed upon him dominion over all the lower creatures. What can bring this home to us more than the contemplation of the vast expanse and the exceeding glory of the heavens studded with countless stars, each keeping its appointed place and course. The Hebrew word here for "man" (*enosh*) denotes man in his weakness, frailty and mortality ; as that in the next clause tells of his descent from the rebel (son of Adam) who fell from his high estate. The contrast between the majesty of the heavens as revealed by night and man in his weakness and sin is indeed overwhelming.

II. And yet God is mindful of man, and visits him. For He made him but little lower than God (Elohim occurs nowhere in Scripture in the sense of "angels," though it is used (Gen. vi. 2, 4) for sons of God. The word expresses the abstract idea of Godhead—divine nature, and therefore that which is godlike. The clause has been rendered "For Thou madest him little less than divine."

Thou visitest him. By angelic ministrations, by prophets, by apostles, by the Holy Ghost, by God the Son : for to the Incarnation the word "visited" is especially applied—*The Lord . . . hath visited and wrought redemption for His people. . . . The dayspring from on high hath visited us* (S. Luke i. 68, 78). *And crownest him with glory and honour.*

“Glory” signifies “dignity,” as that which is weighty ; “honour” represents the external manifestation and splendour of this. Man is a king whom God has crowned and given him territory and subjects—the earth for his domain, and all the lower animate creatures for his subjects.

III. A thousand years later, other shepherds were keeping watch over their flocks by night in those same fields of Bethlehem, while the same stars glittered above them. But lo ! suddenly, a brighter glory than that of the stars shone around them, and they learned better than David the meaning of those words, *Thou had made him but little lower than God, and crownest him with glory and honour.* For to them it was announced by an angel, *I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all the people : for there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord* (S. Luke ii. 10, 11).

And crownest Him with glory and honour. It is this verse that gives to the Psalm its Ascension character. David thought only of man’s dominion over the lower creation. To us these words tell of the coronation in Heaven of Humanity at the Ascension, when the Son of Man, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, was raised from the dead, and set at the right hand of the Father, far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion (Eph. i. 21, 22). Then was consummated God’s eternal purpose for man, that in Christ He should be raised to the throne of Heaven, and reign for ever and ever. Ascension Day, in putting before us our glorious future, should stimulate us to new efforts, that as individuals we may win our crowns.

THE MIRROR OF PERFECTION

“ Lord, who shall dwell in Thy tabernacle : or who shall rest upon Thy holy hill ? ”—PSALM xv. 1.

THE close similarity between Psalms xv and xxiv make it probable that both were composed for the same occasion—the removal of the Ark to Zion, and the consecration of the tabernacle there (cf. II Sam. vi. 12-19 ; I Chr. xv. 11-15). It seems certain that Psalm xxiv was written with reference to this event ; but some have objected that in this Psalm the title “ holy mountain,” as applied to Zion, suggests a later date ; since it was the removal of the Ark thither that made the mountain holy.

In the collect for Ascension Day, we pray that “ we may in heart and mind thither ascend, and with Him continually dwell.” From this Psalm we may learn what sort of character must be cultivated that this prayer may become effective in us, and that in heart and mind we may dwell with Christ.

I. The Psalm opens with a question. It is addressed to Jehovah, Who alone can answer it. The “ tabernacle,” primarily, refers to the tent in which the Ark of the Covenant was placed ; the “ holy hill ” to Mount Zion after David had established the Ark there ; for it was, indeed, the presence of the Ark that rendered the mountain holy. But, in a spiritual sense, the tabernacle (tent) undoubtedly stands for the Church Militant, because tents are the habitations of those engaged in war, not of those at rest ; and the “ holy hill ” is the Church triumphant. Some commentators take both of the same thing, viz., the kingdom of Heaven.

II. The answer, inspired by the Holy Ghost, presents to us the picture of a man who dwells in close communion with God. We may notice that it treats chiefly of the external life, not of inward grace ; since in a picture only that which is external can be transferred to the canvas, though the character of the portrait may suggest the spirit by which the man is inspired.

i. First, come the positive virtues manifested in a holy

life. These are viewed under three aspects—the man's walk, his works and his words. The portrait is sketched in three masterly strokes—he walks uprightly, he works righteousness, and he speaks the truth from his heart (v. 2).

(a) In Holy Scripture, our walk signifies our conduct, especially in regard to ourselves and in God's sight, the inward more than the outward life (Gen. v. 24 ; S. Luke i. 6 ; Acts ix. 31).

(b) Our work—that we should deal justly with all, recognizing the rights of God and of our neighbour, as well as of ourselves.

(c) Our words—that they be not only verbally true, but that our innermost thoughts and motives be in accord with them ; that we should be sincere.

ii. In addition to these positive virtues there are also certain negative traits. The upright man is not one who injures his neighbour (v. 3) :

(a) By word—*He that hath used no deceit in his tongue.*

(b) By deed—*He hath not done evil to his neighbour.*

(c) He has not joined with others in propagating slander.

iii. The picture is completed by a series of affirmations and negations (vv. 4-6) :

(a) He is humble in his own sight, and honours the good ;

(b) He regards his oath as inviolable.

(c) He is not avaricious in the use of his money, nor does he take bribes for wrong-doing.

III. In the previous Psalm we are told that there is not one righteous before God (Ps. xiv. 3, 4). To the rich young man Christ said, There is none good save one, even God. Therefore this picture of a character entirely free from blemish can be none other than the portrait of our Lord Himself, as depicted in the Gospels. But in a measure this may be reproduced by those who follow Him, through the operation of the Holy Ghost in their hearts.

THE DESIRE OF THE HEART OF JESUS

"The King shall rejoice in Thy strength, O Lord : exceeding glad shall he be of Thy salvation. Thou hast given Him His heart's desire : and hast not denied Him the request of His lips."—PSALM xxi. 1, 2.

OF all the Ascension Psalms this is perhaps most full of lessons for that great Feast. It is linked most closely with the preceding Psalm—that being a Litany of supplication before entering upon the conflict ; this the ascription of praise for the glorious victory gained. Both are entirely devoted to the affairs of the King, and both are Messianic, telling the Jew of King Messiah, teaching us of the King of kings, our Lord Jesus Christ.

I. The heart's desire of the King. What was it ? The eternal purpose, determined before the world began, the mystery hid from ages, and from generation ; and revealed only on Calvary—the purpose of the Redemption of man, with all that this involved to Christ of sorrow, suffering, humiliation, and death.

Psalm xx. begins, *The Lord hear Thee in the day of trouble.* This is the prayer of the Church, speaking to her Lord, as He goes forth to His final conflict on the day of the Cross. Then, Christ offered a threefold prayer : for Himself, for His disciples, and for His enemies. Then, He revealed the desire of His heart—For Himself : *Father, the hour is come ; glorify Thy Son, that the Son may glorify Thee* (S. John xvii. 1). And the prayer was answered, when the Gentiles were brought into His Church. For His disciples—*I pray . . . for those whom Thou hast given Me ; I pray . . . that they may all be one ; . . . that they also may be with Me ; that they may behold My glory* (S. John xvii. 9-24). This was first answered, when the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and soul (Acts iv. 32) ; and the prayer is being answered now, as His children are being succoured in temptation ; and the prayer will be accomplished in all its fulness when His saints reign with Him in Heaven. For His enemies He prayed, *Father,*

forgive them ; for they know not what they do (S. Luke xxiii. 34).

His heart's desire led Him down from the songs of the angels to the blasphemies of Calvary ; and He said ere He died, With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer (S. Luke xxii. 15) ; and in that true Passover, then instituted, He desires that we may eat His Body and Blood to the strengthening and refreshing of our souls until He returns to take us into His Kingdom.

II. *Thou hast given Him His heart's desire : and hast not denied Him the request of His lips.* Therefore on this great Feast, when His victory won, and all the work of salvation accomplished, He ascended into Heaven, we behold Him finally crowned with glory. How many crowns he wore ! *The crown with which His mother crowned Him* (Cant. iii. 11)—the crown of flesh at His Incarnation, as S. Bernard tells us. The crown of thorns with which His stepmother the Jewish Church crowned Him. And finally at the Ascension, He was crowned by His Father with a crown of glory (v. 3). The Vulgate with the Septuagint has here *a crown of precious stones*. That is the multitude of the redeemed, each a gem more or less brilliant according to his fewer or greater merits (cf. Mal. iii. 17).

III. *He asked life of Thee, and Thou gavest Him a long life : even for ever and ever* (v. 4). With this we may take our Lord's words, *Father, the hour is come : glorify Thy Son, that the Son may glorify Thee* (S. John xvii. 1). The hour had then come for the consummation of Christ's sacrifice by death ; the glorification for which He prayed was His resurrection to life (with what this involved in the gift of life to all who come to Him), and His Ascension into Heaven and enthronement as the King of Glory. The voices in Heaven proclaimed, *The kingdom of the world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever* (Rev. xi. 15).

THE TRIUMPHAL RETURN OF THE KING OF GLORY

“ Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors: and the King of glory shall come in, etc.”—
PSALM XXIV. 1-10.

THIS Psalm, undoubtedly composed for the removal of the Ark from the house of Obed-edom to Mount Zion, is evidently intended to be sung antiphonally; and it consists of two clearly marked divisions—the preparation for Christ’s entrance to Mount Zion (vv. 1-6), and the entry itself (7-10).

I. The moral preparation for all true approach to God in His sanctuary is described. *Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in His holy place?* (v. 3). There are four conditions: *Clean hands*—freedom from evil deeds. *Pure hearts*—freedom from evil thoughts. *He that hath not lift up his mind unto vanity.* The Septuagint and Vulgate render this, *he that hath not received his soul in vanity*—that is, he who lifts up his soul to accomplish the work for which he was created, to fulfil the duties to which God calls him, and not to the vain things of the world, which profit nothing to the soul. *Nor sworn to deceive*—the man of integrity, whose word is his bond. *Such a man shall receive the blessing from the Lord: and righteousness from the God of his salvation* (v. 6). That is, he shall be clothed with the wedding garment, the righteousness of Christ, without which none can stand in the King’s presence (cf. S. Matt. xxii. 11-14).

In the fullest sense there is but One in Whom all these conditions were fulfilled. Therefore to the question, *Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord?* the answer might be, *No man hath ascended into heaven, but He that descended out of heaven, even the Son of Man, which is in heaven* (S. John iii. 13).

I. *Lift up your heads, etc.* The “King of Glory” is a title nowhere applied to any but the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. Hence it is evidently Christ Himself of Whom David wrote. Now, in prophetic vision, he

sees One Who is able to enter the gates of Heaven. "Ye *everlasting* doors" cannot refer to the tabernacle, or to the temporal Israel, but only to the eternal kingdom of Christ. That *the King of Glory*—the Giver of eternal glory—*may come in*. In their Christian application, these verses celebrate the return of the King of Glory to His heavenly throne, after having accomplished the work of Redemption for which He became Man. The accompanying choir of angels is prophetically described as singing the refrain—*Lift up your heads, O ye gates . . . and the King of Glory shall come in*. To this the hosts in heaven respond with the question—*Who is the King of Glory?* They are answered, *It is the Lord strong and mighty, even the Lord mighty in battle*—The Victor in the conflict with evil, the Conqueror of death and Hades, Who as man has overcome, and now enters heaven, that He may sit down with the Father in His throne (cf. Rev. i. 18 ; iii. 21).

III. The repetition of the antiphonal hymn—*Lift up your heads*, etc.—has been taken to refer to our Lord's triumphal entry into heaven, after the Last Judgment, with all the redeemed in His train. Then, with all His saints, shall He pass through the celestial portals to His eternal throne, that throne of which He said, *To him that overcometh will I give to sit with Me in my throne*. Then begins that reign of bliss, when God shall have wiped away the tears from all eyes ; when sin, the cause of sorrow, shall be destroyed ; and *the tabernacle of God is with men and He shall dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God* (Rev. xxi. 3).

God grant to us now so to follow the example of Christ's life, with clean hands, and pure hearts, and truthful lips, that we may then be numbered with the saints in glory everlasting.

SOME FRUITS OF THE ASCENSION

"Thou hast ascended on high, Thou hast led captivity captive; Thou hast received gifts among men; Yea, among the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell with them."—PSALM lxviii. 18.

FOR the application of this passage, we have the inspired interpretation of S. Paul (Eph. iv. 7-12). We find, however, a seeming discrepancy; since S. Paul for "*Thou hast received gifts among (or from) men,*" substitutes "*He gave gifts unto men.*" The explanation of this alteration demands a careful examination of that peculiar function of the Ark to which the verse refers.

I. Our conception of the Ark with the Mercy-Seat, as the principal object in the Holy of Holies, in the Temple, somewhat obscures our realization that this was not its original purpose, as set forth in its earlier history. There, it appears, first, as the leader of the host in the march through the wilderness, in virtue of its being, in some sense, the dwelling-place of Jehovah. Afterwards, it is seen leading the hosts of Israel to their conquests in Canaan (cf. Josh. vi. 4-13; Numb. xiv. 44; I Sam. iv. 3-6; II Sam. vii. 11; xv. 24-29). It is this latter aspect of the Ark that is in the Apostle's mind, when he uses the Ark as a figure of Christ's Ascension into heaven; and of His bestowal upon His Church of the Pentecostal gifts.

The familiar thought of the Ark, returning after a victorious campaign, followed by captives and their spoil in triumphant procession, is in the mind of the Psalmist in writing the words—*Thou hast led captivity captive; Thou hast received gifts among men.* But the verb "*to take*" (or *receive*) can never mean "*to give.*" S. Paul, however, sees in this return of the Ark a higher spiritual significance. As God of old had come down to fight for His people so Christ had descended to the earth for the salvation of men. But in His triumphal return to heaven, leading captive sin, death, hell, and all evil powers, Christ, in His ascended life, does not *take*, but *gives* gifts to men. S. Paul therefore substitutes the one word for the other,

without at all putting the one word as a translation of the other. He seizes the great idea suggested by the Psalmist's figure, and by the substitution of a word represents it in its true fulfilment.

II. *He gave gifts unto men.* The "He" is emphatic. All the gifts and graces, alike of the Church and of the individual, flow from Christ as the fruits of His finished work. The gifts were the spoils of Calvary, of Christ's battle-field. They are regarded here in their relation to His triumphant return to heaven, as the gifts of the Holy Ghost, as the gift of a finished redemption, the gift of the Christian type of character, and, under the text as interpreted by S. Paul, especially as the gift of the Church and its ministry. This would include the gift of the Bible, and of all those various graces to individuals which are necessary for the edification of Christ's mystical body the Church.

III. The gifts to the Church, which S. Paul here enumerates, are five—*some apostles ; and some prophets ; and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers* (Eph. iv. 11).

These charismatic ministries, needed for the upbuilding of the Church, are thought to have existed, in the early Church, side by side with the regular ministerial orders of bishops, priests, and deacons; and still to inhere potentially in the episcopate, and to be available for special work, as emergencies arise.

We may observe that in the Kingly gifts of Christ, the rebellious are expressly included—*yea, among the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell with them.* Surely, this foreshadows the tender mercy of Christ, that in His Church there is provision for the greatest sinner, in its ministries of penitence.

WHITSUN JOY

"But let the righteous be glad; let them exult before God: Yea, let them rejoice with gladness."—PSALM lxviii. 3.

EACH festival has its own special joy—Christmas, Easter, Ascension, Whitsuntide. The last, as set forth in this Psalm, is the joy of the spoils or gifts of Victory. At Easter, we celebrate our Lord's victory over sin and death; at the Ascension, His triumphant entry into Heaven to take His seat at the right hand of the Father, there to reign for ever. Then, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men. To-day, we celebrate the bestowal and reception of those gifts. They are many and diverse, but all are summed up in the gift of the Holy Ghost Himself. This gift should produce in us certain fruit. S. Paul enumerates nine virtues as comprised in that fruit—Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, temperance (Gal. v. 22). So that we may regard the joy to which our thoughts are to-day directed as the second of the fruits of the Holy Ghost.

Joy has its seat in all three spheres of our being. There is physical joy, the joy of life itself: a buoyant exuberance, often experienced in fellowship with the beauties of nature: in early Spring, when she puts on anew the mantle of life, and the grass and trees and flowers, the birds and insects, and the babbling brooks—all the voices of nature—call us to join them in singing a hymn of joy to God for the gift of life. Then, there is intellectual joy in the pursuit of truth, in its investigation and discovery. And lastly, moral joy, the joy of the soul in goodness. But the joy of Whitsuntide is essentially joy in God. He is its cause and its object. Let us consider the motive and reason for our joy in God.

I. The character of God. His righteousness, truth, and mercy; His eternal opposition to evil, and delight in good. His character may be summed up in two words—Holiness and Love. Holiness in regard to His own perfections, and love in His relation to His creatures; for God is Love. To these we may add His attribute of

Immutability. God is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever (cf. Heb. xiii. 8). Hence, "His property is *always* to have mercy." We do not have to fear any change in our Heavenly Father, or in His love for us. We do not have to choose a time, when He is propitious, that we may approach Him; for *now* is the acceptable time, *now* is the day of salvation (cf. II Cor. vi. 2). In Him is all beauty, goodness, and truth; therefore in the contemplation of His infinite perfections we rejoice as having found our IDEAL, the satisfaction of all our desires.

II. Our relation to God. We are not only His creatures, the workmanship of His hands, but we are His children, united to Him by the tenderest ties, taught by His Holy Spirit to say, Abba, Father! We are thus assured of a Father's love, a Father's care, a Father's interest in our happiness.

On the other hand, these privileges carry with them corresponding responsibilities. As His children, we must love Him with all our heart, and soul, and mind, and strength (S. Mark xii. 30); we must trust Him with the ordering of our lives; and obey Him implicitly with loving promptness. How great should be our joy in the realization that we are indeed children of God, and therefore inheritors of heaven.

III. The gifts of nature and of grace. The endowments with which we were born, both mental and physical came from God. Our position and opportunities in life were the gifts of His Providence. But above all, the gifts of grace—the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts; the sacraments of the Church to strengthen us, the guidance of God in all the difficulties of life—what are they but the unfailing proofs of His love? For all we should with thanksgiving rejoice; and at no season more than at the Feast of the Holy Ghost, and of our Mother's birthday.

THE HOLY GHOST OUR GUIDE

"For this God is our God for ever and ever : He will be our guide even unto death."—PSALM xlviii. 14.

IN Holy Scripture, the Holy Ghost is brought before us under many titles—The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, and the Spirit of Christ. He is our Advocate, Comforter, Teacher, Guide; and there is no function of the Holy Ghost more clearly revealed, or more constantly exercised than that of Guidance. Our text is therefore but the anticipation of Christ's words to the Apostles—When He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He shall guide you into all the truth (S. John xvi. 13). In its primary application this promise refers to the Church, but it extends also to each member of the Church, to every baptized soul. The methods by which the Holy Spirit guides us are indeed manifold; for *as the wind bloweth where it listeth and thou hearest the voice thereof, but knowest not whence it cometh, and whither it goeth : so is everyone that is born of the Spirit* (S. John iii. 8). Ordinarily, however, His operations in the guidance of individuals fall under three heads.

I. His guidance through the Church. Doctrines which are *de fide* are such as can be shown to have been accepted *everywhere, always, and by all*; to which must be added those which have been set forth by a council that is recognized as Œcumenical. At the first Œcumenical Council, held at Jerusalem under the presidency of S. James, and at which SS. Peter, Paul, and other Apostles took part, the conciliar decree contained the words—*For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us* (Acts xv. 28). The authoritative teachings of the Church are therefore the first, and most general channel through which the Holy Ghost guides each Christian soul. We must remember too that in our Lord's promise—*He shall guide you into all the truth*—"the truth" includes both doctrines and morals, guidance in conduct as well as guidance in faith. For this reason the Church is our chief guide with regard to what we are to believe, and what we are to do. She alone can give us our Creed and our Code of Morals.

II. His guidance through the Holy Scriptures. In the Creed we express our belief that the Holy Ghost *spake by the prophets*, that is, that the written Word of God is, in a peculiar sense, the utterance of the Holy Ghost. And, of course, we do not confine this to the prophetic books, for prophecy includes all inspired utterances for instruction. The Holy Ghost, however, is not only the Source of Holy Scripture, it is His peculiar office to enlighten the intellects of those studying it, that they may apprehend its hidden meaning. How wonderful it is that a number of devout souls, meditating on the same passage of Scripture will each see in it some different lesson, will each find in it a special message to his own soul, corresponding to his needs, and guiding him in the peculiar difficulties of his own life; so that he may truly say, *Thy Word is a lantern unto my feet, and a light unto my paths* (Ps. cxix. 105).

III. Through the guidance of the voice of conscience. As Isaiah says, *Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it ; when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left* (Isa. xxx. 21). Conscience is the moral sense in man, by which the will is influenced to do what is right, or to abstain from what is wrong. It may be, it often is, perverted, and it needs enlightenment by the Holy Ghost, that it may be God's voice to the soul, guiding it in the great decisions of life. We must train our spiritual ear to listen for the whispers of the Holy Spirit, and discipline our will to render prompt obedience to His inspirations, that God the Holy Ghost may indeed be our Guide even unto death.

THE SAINTS THE HARVEST OF GRACE

"All Thy works praise Thee, O Lord; and Thy saints bless Thee."—PSALM cxlv. 10.

THIS Psalm (which consists of three stanzas, each of seven verses) has for its theme the righteousness and goodness of God : 1. To men in general (vv. 1-7). 2. To those who are especially His beloved—the saints (vv. 8-14). 3. God supplies their needs, and fulfils their desires (vv. 15-21).

I. All God's creatures, as recipients of His goodness, are bound, each according to his ability, to render Him praise, blessing, and thanksgiving. Man alone can fulfil all three duties. The lower creatures are limited to praise ; and that chiefly through the agency of man. A distinction has been recognized between the words "praise" and "blessing." All God's works praise Him in two ways—by fulfilling the purpose for which they were created; and by ministering to us matter for praise. The saints, however, God's beloved ones, also bless Him. They not only receive peculiar blessings from Him, but they have (what other creatures have not) an intellectual, moral, and spiritual nature, endowed with wonderful and varied gifts, which enables them to appreciate the greatness of His bounty, and to respond to it by feelings of gratitude, love, and adoration, actively expressed in their lives. There is a joyous exuberance of emotion in a soul conscious of fellowship with God, which transforms even the most ordinary and commonplace life into a continuous song of blessing—"We praise Thee, we bless Thee, we worship Thee, we glorify Thee, we give thanks to Thee for Thy great glory, O Lord God, heavenly King, God the Father Almighty."

II. The saints are the fruits of the Holy Spirit, the product of grace. All Saints' Day is the harvest of Whitsunday.

We see in the prisons and asylums of the world the failures of human life. We behold the outcome of a fallen nature pursuing its own way apart from God, and under the dominion of the Spirit of Evil. In the saints, on the other

hand, we perceive the immense possibilities for good in fallen man, when brought under the dominion of grace. The nature is the same in the sinner and in the saint. The difficulties and dangers of life, arising from heredity and environment, are probably not very different; but in the saint the will is conformed to the will of God. Their ruling passion, like that of their Lord, is to do the will of their Father in Heaven. They recognize His claim upon them, they seek His aid, they use His grace, and therefore by His strength they triumph, where others fail. The saints, too, had for their ideal the life of Christ. They realized that here they had no abiding city; and therefore they sought that which was to come.

III. *They shall speak of the glory of Thy kingdom, and talk of Thy power* (v. 11). The worldling is absorbed in the affairs of the world, they occupy his thoughts, and form the subject of his conversation. To him the things are full of intense interest; for they make up the principal concern of his life. The saint, on the other hand, is engrossed in the interests of the kingdom of heaven, of which he is a citizen. Its welfare, its glory, its development, take possession of his thoughts, and form the subject of his words. The glory of the Kingdom, the goodness of the King, the splendid hopes to be realized in the great future of eternity, supply subjects of which the mind never wearies, and the tongue never grows tired.

And then His power, Who created the world, and by His grace enables weak man to become more than conqueror in the battle of life, is a theme of such surpassing moment, that a grateful heart, inspired by a willing tongue, discusses it with an eloquence that carries persuasion.

THE NEW CREATION OF GRACE

"Thou sendeth forth Thy Spirit, they are created; and Thou renewest the face of the earth."—PSALM CIV. 30.

THIS Psalm has been likened to the first chapter of Genesis set to music, and therefore entitled "The Inspired Oratorio of Creation." Beginning with the creation of light and of the heavens, the Psalmist gives us, in the form of a poem of exquisite beauty, a commentary on the work of the first five days of creation. There is no distinct reference to the sixth and seventh day—to the creation of man as the crowning work, and to the rest provided for man by the appointment of the sabbath. The Poet limits himself to the panorama of the lower creatures—to nature as seen by us and around us; we are excluded as being ourselves the spectators.

The Church declares the true meaning of the Psalm by appointing it for use on Whitsunday (as also the Roman and Sarum uses); for we then celebrate in the birth of the Church the new creation of grace. In the Nicene Creed, we profess our belief in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; in this second creation, the Life-Giver (Κύριον τὸ Ζωοποιόν). In the first creation we are shown His work as the Agent of the Father and the Son. In the new creation of grace, we behold the work of the Holy Ghost in the kingdom of grace, a work which will continue until the third creation, at the consummation of all things, which will inaugurate the new heaven and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness, which is prophesied by Isaiah and S. Peter, and is revealed to S. John in vision (Isa. lxxv. 17; lxxvi. 22; II S. Pet. iii. 13; Rev. xxi. 1).

I. At Pentecost, by the sending forth of the Holy Spirit, the new kingdom of grace, the Church of Christ was created. It is to extend (by the gradual conversion of the nations) till *the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea*; till Christ's injunction to the Apostles is fulfilled—*Go ye therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the Name of the*

Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost (Isa. xi. 9; S. Matt. xxviii. 19).

II. The kingdom of grace, however, has a personal, as well as a corporate manifestation. It finds a domain in each individual soul (S. Luke xvii. 21) that is *born again of water and the Spirit* (S. John iii. 5); and renews and sanctifies that soul, making it the temple of God (I Cor. iii. 17). Think of the immense energies of the Holy Spirit in the work of grace in your soul. The *Veni Creator Spiritus* and the *Veni Sancte Spiritus* teach us the details of His loving operations.

III. *Thou reneweth the face of the earth.* The Psalm, of which this verse is the antiphon, sets forth the ceaseless creative work of God with regard to all the lower creatures. They have been subjected to vanity on account of man's fall; and with him they are to be delivered from bondage (cf. Rom. viii. 18-21). Created by God to minister to man's needs, and by their beauty and utility to teach man the wisdom, power, and love of God, they are used by Satan, as instruments of temptation, and objects of idolatry, to seduce man from his allegiance to God. But to them, even now, the kingdom of grace brings an amelioration of their condition, since it teaches and enables man to use them for their true end—the glory of God. And, in being thus used, they are enabled to praise God by ministering, according to His purpose, to the needs of His children. Thus the face of the earth is being renewed indirectly through the working of the Holy Spirit in man.

THE WORK OF THE HOLY TRINITY

“ He sendeth out His Word, and melteth them : He causeth His wind to blow, and the waters flow.”—PSALM clvii. 18.

IN this striking verse, we have brought before us the operation of the three Persons of the Holy Trinity in the foundation of the Church and in the salvation of man. It therefore supplies a helpful subject for meditation on the Festival of the Holy Trinity, which immediately follows and completes that of the Holy Spirit; and brings to a close the work of man's Redemption, set before us by the Church in the first half of the Christian year.

I. The work of the Holy Trinity in forming the Church.

i. *He sendeth out His Word.* Here we have the first stage of the work of salvation. *The Father hath sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world* (S. John iv. 14). This shows us the Source and Origin of the Incarnation, that it was the will and act of God the Father. It was the First Person of the Trinity, Who *so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life* (S. John iii. 16). We must never forget that it was our Father's love that willed our salvation.

ii. *And melteth them.* Here we have the work of the Second Person, of the Word made flesh. The mission of Christ was to a world hardened in sin, to a nation ice-bound by a frigid interpretation of their law, which, while insisting on the minute observance of the letter, entirely ignored the spirit of truth, justice, and mercy, that formed its life. Jesus, by His teaching and example, by His parables and miracles, by His gracious words and loving acts, melted men's hearts, and prepared them for the work of the Holy Ghost.

iii. *He causeth His wind to blow, and the waters flow*—that Holy Spirit, the Third Person, Which descended upon the new-born Church at Pentecost, as the rushing of a mighty wind that filled all the house where they were sitting (cf. Acts ii. 2). Christ's work had been to melt

men, and to prepare them for the reception of the gifts which were to come with the Holy Ghost. He selected and prepared the Apostolic College to be the body of His Church, and the Holy Ghost, at His coming, breathed into it the breath of life. So in the creation of man, *the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and (then) breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul* (Gen. ii. 7). Similarly, Christ prepared the form and matter of the sacraments, and the Holy Ghost gave them power and life. The flow of the waters of grace at Pentecost was evidenced by the 3,000 souls then added to the Church; and those waters are to increase and extend, like the waters of Ezekiel (Ezek. xlvii. 3-5), till they cover the earth.

II. The soul of man is a miniature of the Church; and in it a similar threefold operation takes place.

i. The first revelation to the soul is the Fatherhood of God. The first words of prayer taught are the "Our Father." The mission of our Lord on earth was the revelation of the Father to man.

ii. The special work of Christ in the soul is to melt it by appealing to our love through the manifestation of His great love for us in His Passion. *He loved me, and gave Himself for me* (Gal. ii. 20).

iii. Our sanctification is the work of the Holy Ghost. In baptism and confirmation, and through penitence, in raising again to life a soul in mortal sin, He is the Agent. In our prayers and meditations, it is He that maketh intercession for us (Rom. viii. 26).



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